

Naruto and the Dragon's Belt

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On the advice of his long-lost mama, Naruto enters the world's most glamorous tournament, hoping the glory will help in his goal to be Hokage. But first he has to deal with the overwhelming amount of weirdos he's up against, including familiar faces!

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The Challenge

A/N: I'mmmm BACK! This is the one...the story that'll answer certain questions that arose in Quest For/Returning With Mama. It takes place in the same universe that the previous stories occurred in, so it's not completely part of the Naruto canon. However, this isn't exactly part of that series. Just read and have fun. And review! Do that, too!

Disclaimer: Kishimoto owns Naruto

Naruto and the Dragon Belt

Opening theme: Kinnikuman Go Fight (1st opening theme for *Kinnikuman*)

Chapter 1: The Challenge

To the unfocused eye, mornings in the Hidden Leaf Village might seem peaceful. And sometimes they are, in the houses of certain families.

Other families weren't so lucky.

One of those families was the Uzumaki family. Originally consisting of one very lonely boy, it eventually broadened up to include friends and fellow Leaf Ninja. But until recently, something was missing. A blood relation.

"WAKE UP!"

And there she was.

BONG!

"Gah!" Naruto leapt out of bed, terrified out of his wits. His eyes darted around, until they came upon the source of his wake-up call;

His long-lost mother and a gong.

"Good morning, son!" Kushina greeted, smiling the family smile.
"Now drop and give me fifty!"

No one could say Naruto was a disobedient son. But by the time he was one his twenty-seventh push-up, he was starting to have second thoughts.

"Mommmm, it's supposed to be my day off..." he whined, going up and down.

"Not today it's not!" Kushina yelled from the kitchen.

Still a little bleary, and now with numb arms, Naruto slumped into the kitchen and sat down at the table. There was a plate of breakfast before him. Naruto was too shell-shocked and exhausted to really tell what it was.

"Mom..." He asked, mustering enough strength to eat. "What's all this about?"

"From this day forward, you're in training." Kushina announced, "So get ready for this sort of thing!"

"Training?" Naruto asked, his curiosity now piqued, "Training for what?"

"The Dragon Belt Championship," Kushina explained, "It's *the* premier tournament."

"Dragon Belt?" Naruto asked, getting more interested by the second.

"It's the perfect way to cement your position as the next Hokage," Kushina added, "Especially now that the world's so peaceful."

Naruto blinked. *What?*

"Now finish your breakfast," Kushina ordered, "The training begins at the Forest of Death..." She checked the clock, "Ten minutes ago! Eat up!"

Naruto began to chow down. Whatever Mama had in mind, he needed a full-stomach for!

D a t t e b a y o

Outside the Forest of Death, Naruto was now in his jumpsuit. He saluted Kushina.

"Ready to begin training, Mama-sensei!" He announced.

Kushina giggled at her son's enthusiasm. "Glad to hear it." She was wearing an outfit very much like the kind Might Guy and Rock Lee wore, except hers was red, and the sleeves were missing. She also wore a sash that had a detailed image of an serpentine dragon on.

"So, what do I have to do to win this thing?" Naruto asked.

"Well, the Championship is mostly a taijutsu competition," Kushina began, "You can use Ninjutsu, but the preliminaries focus mostly on physical ability."

Naruto thought about it. "Sooooo, how are going to prepare for that?"

"By bulking you up!" Kushina declared, "Your physical power is above average, but that won't be enough! And you're fighting skills could use some polishing, too." She clapped her hands together.

"So! We'll spend have the day exercising, and the other half sparring!"

Naruto grinned, excited. "So, what do we do first?" He asked, eager.

"By jogging!" Kushina jumped over the fence surrounding the Forest. "Keep up!"

"No fair!" Naruto yelled, scrambling after her.

D a t t e b a y o

Kushina might have called it jogging, but Naruto decided it was more like a race against the natives of the Forest- especially after Naruto accidentally knocked over a hornet's nest.

"So, Mama," Naruto yelled, ducking a stray hornet that got ahead of the swarm, "What else can you tell me about the Dragon Belt?"

"Well," Kushina replied, swatting another hornet into a rock, "The tournament occurs every six years, and is always based in the Land of Dragons." At this point, she zipped around a tree. "Practically each nation sends some representatives," She continued, "So it's always a diverse competition."

"Ninja from *every nation*? " Naruto asked, amazed.

"Not just ninja, but samurai, sumo wrestler, and every other style!" Kushina replied, "They'll let anyone enter, and anyone will. You don't have to be part of a Hidden Village!"

A thought occurred to Naruto. "Does the Leaf Village have representatives?"

Kushina nodded. "They always send in three. Don't worry about that, I already took care of that."

The day before, at a meeting of the Leaf Village...

" So, if there's no other business, we have one more item," Tsunade said, "The Dragon Belt. Any volunteers?"

" I recommend Hatake Kakashi, Might Guy, and Mitarashi Anko," Mitokado Homura said, "They are our best Jonin."

" I second," Replied Utane Koharu.

" Are there any objections?" Tsunade asked.

Kakashi stood up. "Right here."

" You're objecting your own nomination?" Tsunade asked, confused.

" As am I!" Guy announced, standing up.

" Ditto!" Anko chimed in.

Everyone was flummoxed. "Can I ask why?" Tsunade demanded.

" We've already entered the last time," Kakashi answered, "The world might think we have no other ninja to enter."

" Exactly!" Guy burst out, "We need to show that the Village has new blood! And that we won't be relying on the obsolete heroes of old!" Guy realized who he was talking to, and shrank under the elders' glare. "Uh, no offense."

" As for me, I already bought tickets, so I can't enter." Anko replied. She held up the aforementioned admission passes and gave them a wave.

Tsunade opened her mouth to say something, but was interrupted by Guy.

"You got tickets?!" Guy asked, amazed. "How!? I've been trying for ages!"

" Eh, I know someone."

" Who-"

" If you three aren't entering," Tsunade cut in, re-taking control of the meeting, "Then who?"

" I think I know someone who might want to enter," Kakashi said vaguely.

Tsunade realized who he was talking about, and smirked. "You might be right. Good idea."

The elders figured out who Kakashi was talking about, and weren't happy about it.

" That's a terrible idea!" Homura protested, "I won't allow it!"

*" Don't be so cranky just because your idea was shot down,"
Tsunade replied, "He's done more for the Village than you have,
including restoring our ties with other countries."*

Homura and Koharu growled. Formal alliances and treaties were one thing, but what kind of fool made friends with people one their enemies?

Iruka stood up. "I think..."

CRASH!

" Damn it, Kushina!" Tsunade yelled, "Would it kill you to not enter like that!? Who do you think cleans up these messes?!"

*Kushina glanced at the large hole where the door used to be.
Various shinobi were scattered all over the place, having dove for cover as she blasted in.*

" Carpenters?" She guessed innocently.

*Tsunade did a face-palm. The worst part was that she was right.
"What is it, Kushina?" She asked instead of commenting the retort.*

" I've come to announce that my son, your next Hokage, will not be able to go on missions for at least fifty days!" Kushina declared. After returning to the Village, Kushina had made it clear that she fully expected Naruto to succeed Tsunade, and was doing everything in her power to help Naruto in his quest for Hokage-dom.

" I'll be busy too, so if you don't see me, that's why!" Kushina added on the way out. She created another hole to leave through, ignoring the first hole she made.

Everyone stared.

" She barged in, told us what's what, and left..." Guy gaped, "It all happened so fast."

Flustered, but otherwise pleased, the elders turned to Tsunade.

" Well, as Uzumaki Naruto won't be available," Koharu said, not bothering to keep the glee out of her voice, "Do we have any other nominations?"

As Kushina thought about that meeting, she couldn't help but wonder: *What were they talking about, anyway?*

"Mama! Pick it up!" Naruto yelled, snapping her out of her voice. "The bees are catching!"

Kushina looked behind her and realized Naruto's error; the swarm wasn't catching up, it had gotten *new recruits*. "Crap! Into the river!"

D a t t e b a y o

After about two hours of running around the Forest of Death, and getting a variety of dangerous animals to chase them, the Uzumaki Family eventually left, and high-tailed it to the edge of a waterfall near the Village.

"What are gonna do here, Mama?" Naruto asked, scratching a few welts.

"Well," Kushina explained, applying ointment on some of her own welts, "With jogging, we exercised mostly your legs. So now, we'll work on your arm strength with some swimming!" She pointed at the water. "Get in there!"

Naruto nodded and began to take off his outer clothing. As he began to enter the water, he asked, "So, how long am I gonna have to do this?"

Kushina looked up at the sun. "For about...three hours," She decided. "Or until you reach the top of the waterfall. Whichever comes first."

"What!" Naruto blanched. "You want me to *climb* the waterfall!?"

"I'm so glad you understand," Kushina smiled, "Now, get wet!"

With a splash, the training continued...

D a t t e b a y o

A/N: Annnnd I add the most important thing to the Naruto universe! A tournament arc! The closest the canon's had to a tournament arc was the chunin exam, which kinda got sidetracked by Orochimaru's invasion. This time, nothing's gonna stop the race for the title...though I can't guarantee that it'll be a straightforward ride...

Oh, yeah, and I'm gonna stop giving theme songs to each chapters...I'll change it every few chapters, it's just that I'm running out of appropriate music. Later!

The Teammate

Kishimoto owns Naruto

Opening theme: Kinnikuman Go Fight

Chapter 2: The Teammate

"I cannot believe we were selected to represent the Leaf Village in the Dragon Belt!" Lee cheered, doing sit-ups. He was one of his four-hundredth.

After the meeting, it had been decided that Rock Lee, Hyuga Neji, and Tenten would represent the Leaf Village in the Dragon Belt Championship. As such, they were given a month off to train for the try outs. They also received a pamphlet on the Championship's rules.

"Tenten! Neji!" Lee called out to his teammates, who were just standing around. "Come and join me! We need to become even stronger before we can enter!"

"Calm down, Lee," Tenten said, "We don't know what kind of tournament this is. Simply bulking up won't be enough," she turned to Neji, "Right?"

Neji didn't look up from the pamphlet he was reading. "Actually, 'bulking up' is what we should concentrate on." He skimmed the pages some more. "Before the main tournament, the preliminaries are that test the entrants physical ability. They sound pretty extreme."

Lee, his curiosity now piqued, stopped his sit-ups and walked over to read over Neji's shoulder. "How extreme?" The bowl-cut asked.

Neji tapped a page of the pamphlet. "According to this, an earlier preliminary involved making the contestants get run down by a cattle

stampede."

"What!?" Lee yelled, and ripped the pamphlet from Neji. "It does not say that!" He quickly read the page and sweated. "Oh, wait...it does. Uh oh!" He glanced in Neji and Tenten's direction. "It says here that armor and metal weapons are prohibited."

Neji glanced at Tenten. "I see what you mean."

Tenten didn't like the way they were staring at her. "Hey, what are those looks for?"

"Your fighting style *does* require a lot of weapons, Tenten," Neji remarked, "You may be have harder time then we will."

Now Tenten was angry. "What's that supposed to mean!?" She yelled, causing both boys to jump back. "I can fight just fine by myself! I don't need weapons!"

"Uh, Tenten, calm down..." Neji said, trying to appease his teammate. But it was too late. Woman's fury had been aroused. And hell hath no fury like modern ninja feminist.

D a t t e b a y o

While the men of team Guy were being shown just how well Tenten could fight without weapons, Naruto was flat on his back, soaking wet. He had finished his river exercise. According to Kushina, this little work out had gone...swimmingly, pun intended, which didn't make Naruto's arms hurt less. Combined with the pressure from the water flow, his lungs was also burning from having to hold his breath, as he had trouble keeping his head above water.

"Let's take a break for lunch," Kushina decided, unpacking a picnic basket. "I made some box lunches while you were swimming."

Faster than Kushina could see, one of the sandwiches was snatched out of her hand. Naruto began chewing vigorously.

"Hey! Unwrap it from the plastic, first!" Kushina yelled.

After calming Naruto down, the Uzumaki family began to eat.

"So, mama," Naruto began, "Did you do this kind of training?"

"I'm doing my best," Kushina apologized, "But it's hard. This soft country doesn't have the same kind of wilderness the Land of Whirlpools has."

Naruto munched on an apple, thinking. "What kind of wilderness is that?"

"Well," Kushina said casually, "The jungle's were full of plants that attacked people, there was a family of kappa living one of the rivers, but it was a pretty boring place, to be honest."

Naruto stared, awestruck. Man-eating plants? *Kappas*? "You call that boring?" He asked, amazed.

"The locals were used to it, that's all." A gruff voice broke in, and out from the bushes stepped in Morino Ibiki, head of the Hidden Leaf's interrogation department.

"I had trouble finding you," He said to Kushina, "At least, finding you alone."

"Hey, *I'm* here!" Naruto said.

Ibiki grinned. "I know."

Pretty soon, Ibiki had joined the picnic, eating his own lunch.

"So, um, Ibiki," Naruto said, "How come you know mama?"

"We first met when my team were just genin," Ibiki explained, "Just a trio of brats, fresh out of the academy. As rookies, we were given the lowest-ranking missions. One day, we mouthed off to the Third

Hokage, demanding to be given a real mission. And boy...did we get one."

"What does this have to do with you and mama?" Naruto asked, impatient.

"I'm getting there, cool it!" Ibiki barked, getting annoyed. Calming down, he continued. "Our mission was a delivery run...we were supposed to hand-deliver a package to a foreign country...the Land of Whirlpools."

"Comic books," Kushina elaborated, "My sensei loved to read comics from other lands."

Naruto suddenly had a vision of blond Kakashi giggling not porn, but that month's issue of Shonen Jump.

"Anyway," Ibiki said, ignoring the interruption. "We chartered a boat, and went to the Land of Whirlpools... We thought we would be back in a few days, but ended up staying a whole month."

"Why?" Naruto asked.

"Because the Land of Whirlpools is surrounded by fierce swirling currents," Kushina explained, "They're so strong that any ship that tries to enter the surrounding water is smashed to pieces. They only slow down enough for ships to pass through on one day, every thirty days."

"Bit of a shock when we found out," Ibiki grinned. "I had a feeling that if we stayed any longer, Team Jiraiya would have been declared MIA."

Team Jiraiya? Naruto's eyes widened. "You were on Ero-Sennin's genin team?! But that means...!"

Ibiki chuckled. "Yeah, the Fourth Hokage was my teammate." He sighed, looking up, "In the Land of Whirlpools, we met this obnoxious

girl at the dock, who pestered us about everything we knew about the Hidden Leaf Village, and everything around it." He glanced at Kushina. "If I recall, Jiraiya-sensei taught you the Shadow Clone technique to shut you up. I think he was hoping you'd die while learning."

Kushina stuck out her tongue, and glanced at her watch. Getting up, she dusted herself off.

"All right, that's enough rest," She stated, "It's time to get back to the training."

"Right!" Naruto got up and saluted. "So, what now?"

"Now, we see what you can do," Kushina said, "I want you to fight me, and give me everything you've got!" She took a fighting stance, "I should let you know, I don't plan on teaching you any fancy moves. I want you to develop your own unique style, and not one derived from me. Most ninja get beat because they copy someone else's fighting techniques, because an experienced warrior is already used to that method."

"I better be going then," Ibiki said, standing up, "I don't want to get in the way- or the crossfire." He tapped the scars on his face.

Everyone in the Village had assumed that Ibiki's scars were the result of some horrific interrogation process used by an enemy during the wars. And while it was true he had gotten the scars during the war, he never told anyone that it was because he got between Kushina and someone she was fighting.

"All right," Neji said, looking plenty scuffed, "Now that our abrupt sparring session is over, can we please start training."

Tenten rubbed the back of her head, chuckling sheepishly. One of her cheeks were swollen.

"Neji!" Lee shouted, raising his hand. He had a black eye. "I have a suggestion!"

Neji looked at Lee. "And what is it?"

"We should wear these during the training!" Lee whipped out an extra pair of ankle weights.

"You're already wearing them," Tenten pointed out, "How's that going to be different from how you normally train?"

"I will be wearing *heavier* weights!"

Neji thought about it. Lee always gained a boost of speed after taking off his weights, so their function as a training tool was not overstated.

"Very well," Neji decided aloud, "We'll use the weights..." There was the sound of a small explosion coming from the other side of the Village. "What was that?"

That's it! That's one of the questions answered I mentioned earlier! You see, no one knows who that bald kid in Team Jiraiya really is. I've read dozens of fanfictions where the girl was Mikoto, Sasuke's mother, but no one ever bothers with the bald kid. Now, I know what you're going to say. "But that bald kid doesn't look anything like Ibiki!" my response is that not all kids look like miniature versions of their adult selves.

Yeah, this is basically filler, I guess. But I want to get a few chapters of Naruto going through the kind of training he needs for the Dragon Belt. Dragonball did the same thing for Goku's first attempt at the Budokai.

And review! I mean, c'mon! I got only one! Tell me what you think!!!

Keep On Trying!

Kishimoto owns Naruto

Opening theme: Kinnikuman Go Fight

Chapter 3: Keep On Trying...!

The field where the Uzumaki family had their sparring match.

If someone who did not know what was going on, they would have thought a war had broken out, should they come onto the scene- though the more imaginative would have thought several natural disasters struck. There was slashes in the earth, craters were everywhere, and in the middle of it all were Naruto and his mother.

Naruto, panting heavily, said, "How do you like that, mama?"

Kushina, who looked perfectly fine, shrugged. "You make a pretty good Leaf Ninja," Naruto shone with pride, "But that's not good enough for the Dragon Belt."

Naruto's face fell. "Are you kidding me!?"

"I keep telling you," Kushina said, "This is *the* tournament. You can't be good enough- you have to be *beyond* what normal warriors call good."

"Aw, man..." Naruto groaned. He fell back onto the ground.

Seeing the despondence in her son, Kushina walked over and sat down next to him.

"Don't be like that," She said, combing his hair with her fingers, "We've just started. We'll get you back up to speed in no time!" She punctuated her statement with a wink.

Naruto didn't meet her eyes. His gaze was on the sky. "I...I'm supposed to have surpassed Kakashi-Sensei by now..."

Kushina tapped his forehead. "And you have! But why stop there?"

Naruto adjusted his vision toward Kushina.

"You're already one of the strongest ninja in this village," Kushina went on, "But that doesn't mean anything in the tournament. You have to train like you're planning to take on the world- which is what you'll be doing." When Naruto didn't answer, she added, "I wouldn't make you do it if it wasn't impossible. If anything, you're the only one in the village who *can* win."

That made Naruto feel better. As he smiled, another thought occurred to him.

"Mama, you said that winning the Dragon Belt will help me become Hokage," Naruto pointed out, "How does that work out?" When he was a kid, he had thought that doing well in the Chunin Exam would cement his position as Hokage, and it was quite a blow to find out it wouldn't...though his beating Neji in front of all the local lords *had* improved his reputation.

"Oh, that's simple!" Kushina moved herself so that she was sitting Indian-style across from Naruto. Naruto, who despite his reputation for obliviousness, sensed a lecture coming up and sat up to give her his full attention.

"In the past, the selection of Hokage is based on who can best protect and maintain the peace of the Hidden Leaf Village," Kushina began, "That's the official reason, right?"

Naruto nodded. But what did she mean by *official*?

"In reality," Kushina continued, "The Hokage is someone who has the public face the village needs."

Naruto, typically, didn't get it. And said so.

"Let me put it this way," Kushina explained, "Let's say if someone like Orochimaru or Danzo got put in charge. Would *you* want to go to work with a Village being run by those misers?"

"Hell no!" Naruto yelled. He didn't want to have anything to do with *either* of them! He wasn't sure which one he hated more!

"Good answer." Kushina nodded before continuing, "So, each Hokage is selected based on their strength, and more importantly, what kind of rep they have. During the Great Ninja Wars, each Hokage became famous for their power and skill on the battlefield, and what they did off it."

"But there aren't any wars going on now," Naruto complained, "And wars suck!"

"That's right, they do!" Kushina agreed, "So in lieu of a war, we've got the Dragon Belt for you!" She pointed directly at Naruto. "You do well in this thing, and fame will be yours."

"All right!" Naruto cheered. It all made sense now! Suddenly a light bulb turned on above his head. "Wait... Old Man Third said something like that too, once... about how the Chunin Exam was a substitute for war..."

"Yeah, multi-national contests are big advertising campaigns for the Hidden Villages." Kushina explained.

Naruto sweatdropped. *Yeah, I guess she's right...but the Third made it sound cooler...*

"Hey! Naruto!"

The Uzumaki family looked to see Lee, Neji, and Tenten walking up to them.

"We should have guessed it was you two," Tenten commented, looking around, "It sounded like a war or Armageddon was happening..."

"What were you doing, anyway?" Neji asked, looking around. No amount of friendly roughhousing could cause this much destruction...

"I'm training!" Naruto announced, pumping his arm, "For the Dragon Belt!"

What? Neji gaped for a moment, before realizing something, as did Tenten.

"I've come to announce that my son, your next Hokage, will not be able to go on missions for at least fifty days!" Kushina declared.

The two rational members of Team Guy sweatdropped.

So that's *what she meant...* they both thought.

Lee, however, wasn't thinking about the meaning behind Kushina's vague announcement. "That is great, Naruto!" He yelled, "I was afraid you would miss out on this!"

"Like I would!" Naruto laughed.

"Naruto, my teammates and I are also entering!" Lee declared, "I hope you will not be discouraged if one of us beat you!"

"Don't worry, you guys can't beat me!" Naruto taunted, "I'd keep training if I were you!"

"That's actually a good idea," Neji cut in, trying to establish a discussion of lower volume. When Naruto and Lee got into a heated talk, things got LOUD. "We should probably get back to our own training."

As Team Guy and the Uzumaki family exchanged goodbyes, Kushina noticed something in Lee's hands.

"What are those?" She asked curiously.

"These? These are training weights!" Lee proclaimed, holding on up into the air.

Kushina took that one and tested how it weighed in her hand. "Training..." she murmured. After a minute, she asked Lee where he had gotten them. After telling her about the store for training supplies, Team Guy went off to train for the Dragon Belt.

"Naruto," Kushina said, turning to her son, "From now on, we'll be doing what we did today as our training regimen."

Naruto nodded.

"Except, you'll be doing your exercises while wearing those weights on your wrists and ankles!" Kushina finished.

"What!" Naruto cried, "That's too much!"

"In this contest, there's no such thing as too much," Kushina admonished sternly, "It's only too much if you end up killing yourself."

Naruto frowned. He didn't like it, but that made sense. "So, I'm going to wear those weights the entire time?"

"Not *all* the time," Kushina answered, "During our sparring sessions, you'll take them off to get used to your increased strength and speed."

Naruto thought about that. It made sense.

"Now, let's get back to work!" Kushina yelled, pointing, "If we're not training, we're slacking! Are you a slacker!?"

"No, Ma'am!" Naruto yelled, saluting.

D a t t e b a y o

(A/N: Okay, this is the training montage. I'll do it the best I can, but this is the first time I've done something like this, so bear with me.)

Background music: BGM for Idai na Tamashii

"Naruto, in the Land of Whirlpools, they say a man named Kamehame became the first warrior by honing his power at sea and his speed in the jungle. Can you do the same thing, son?"

Kushina speeds through the Forest of Death, hopping from tree to tree. Behind her, Naruto is following, now wearing training weights on his wrists and ankles. Just as he lands on one branch, the limb breaks, sending Naruto into the river below.

Elsewhere, Tenten and Neji are having a sparring match, refereed by Lee. Tenten charges at Neji, who knocks her back with a Gentle Fist strike. After a minute, Tenten gets back up, and gives Neji a 'come on' wave...before falling back down.

Lee is now using a jump rope to exercise. He jump ropes so quickly that a cloud of dust builds up, hiding him from view. When the dust clears, Lee is now hogtied.

Neji is doing push-ups. On his back is a sandbag to provide more challenge to this exercise. However, he's so busy going up and down that he doesn't realize he's sinking- until it's too late. Off to the side, a workman is hammering a sign into the ground. The sign says WARNING: SINKHOLE

"Seems hard, doesn't it, to climb a wall with no hand-holds? But hard doesn't mean impossible. The key to success isn't just power and knowledge, but a heart that never gives up, no matter how hard it gets. Kamehame possessed those things himself, and that's why his name will never be forgotten."

At the river, Naruto is busy swimming against the current. At the top of the waterfall, Umino Iruka is setting up a campfire with a pot of water cooking over it. As he adds some instant ramen to the broth, the smell drifts down to Naruto. When the scent of ramen cooking reaches Naruto's nose, he shoots up over the waterfall. Kushina, surprised, leaps up after him and sees her son inhaling Iruka's ramen. Iruka looks surprised.

Lee is pumping weights. He pumps them so fast that one flies out of his hand! A minute later Kakashi walks up to him, a weight in his hand and a lump on his hand.

Tenten jogs up the stairs of a shrine. Upon reaching the top, she turns around and raises her arms in the air, jumping slightly. It's at this moment a passing civilian bumps into her, sending Tenten down the stairs.

Neji, meanwhile, is not having a good time. By now, he's sunk so deeply that only his head is visible. It doesn't help when Konohamaru walks up to him, bends down, and starts doodling on his face.

"You can do it too. Just keep training!"

Tenten and Neji are sparring again. Tenten lunges, and Neji strikes, but this time, Tenten dodges the blow, and puts Neji into a cobra twist. After they separate, Neji looks surprised while Tenten's amazement turns to a look of thrill.

Lee is using the jump rope again. Again, he jumps it so fast that a dust cloud covers him, and when the dust clears, he is hogtied. This time, however, he quickly slips out of the ropes.

Neji is STILL trapped in the sinkhole. By now, Moegi and Udon have joined Konohamaru in the fun, and the Hyuga's face is covered in graffiti. Suddenly, he bursts from the ground and into the air, landing behind Team Konohamaru. The look he gives them sends the kids running.

Naruto takes off his weights and prepares to face his mother. Kushina, not taking a fighting stance, motions for him to come forward. Naruto nods, and shoots towards her. A second later, he's behind her, tripping and falling flat on his face. Kushina, however, has a shocked look on her face, and bruise on her cheek. She then smiles.

"Hey! Who said you could slack off!? Get back to work!"

Naruto gets up from where he's fallen and gives Kushina thumbs-up. And they go at it again...!

D a t t e b a y o

A/N: Okay, with this chapter, the training arc is officially over! Naruto will be leaving town for sure next time...if 'next time' ever comes.

Oh, don't mind me. I'm just a little disappointed that not many people have reviewed. Lately, I seem to be getting only one review per chapter. You see, there's no way to tell if someone's been reading the story unless they review, and I only get motivated if I know people are reviewing. You don't have to say you liked it- just tell me what you think!

READ! REVIEW! JUST CLICK THE BUTTON THAT SAYS 'REVIEW THIS STORY/CHAPTER'! IT'S THAT SIMPLE!

...Sorry about that. I'm just a little perturbed. (Goes to find a dictionary)

Idai na Tamashii : Means, A Great Soul. The character theme song for Kinnikuman Great, sung by Kushida Akira, for the anime *Kinnikuman* , created by Yudetamago.

Enter the Dragon Country

Naruto is owned by Kishimoto

Opening theme: Kinnikuman Go Fight

Chapter 4: Enter the Dragon (Country)

In the Hokage's Office, four ninja stood before Tsunade, ready and awaiting orders.

Hatake Kakashi, the Copy Ninja.

Haruno Sakura, Tsunade's apprentice.

Codename: Yamato, wood-style user.

Codename: Sai, former Root operative.

They were Team 7- old and new members combined.

"Your mission is to go to the Land of Dragons and oversee our representatives' progress in the Dragon Belt Championships," Tsunade began without preamble, "Along with that, I need you to keep an eye on Naruto."

"Keep an eye..." Sakura repeated, unsure. "Why would we need to do that? If Ms. Kushina's going with Naruto, won't that be enough protection?"

"I'm not sure Naruto's the only one who needs protection..." Tsunade murmured, looking away.

Yamato got her meaning. "You're afraid the tournament might bring out the Kyuubi?" He asked.

"Among other things..." Tsunade answered. Looking directly at her troops, she said, "The Dragon Belt doesn't just attract entrants from Hidden Villages," She explained to Sakura and Sai, "Warriors both legal and illegal fight in the tournament as well."

"You mean criminals enter as well?" Sai asked, "The tournament sponsors must be very stupid to allow that."

"It's no mistake," Kakashi replied, "In order to make the contest 'more interesting' the Dragon Belt Council made a full pardon for any past crime part of the 1st place prize. And because of the criminals entering the country for the tournament, bounty hunters also appear. The entire nation is a series of sneak attacks just waiting to happen."

"Bounty hunters..." Sakura murmured, thinking about it. A light turned on in her head. "You think those guys we told you about might be there!?"

"Bounty hunters, Akatsuki...anything's possible," Tsunade said, "There's no telling what will happen in the Dragon Belt. Just keep a distant watch on Naruto- Try not to let him know you're there and why. I don't want him getting distracted."

"Yes, ma'am!"

As the four of them left the office, Kakashi looked up at the ceiling.

How nostalgic... Kakashi thought, when Tsunade called him back.

"What is it, Lady Tsunade?" Kakashi asked, poking his head.

"I'd just thought I'd warn you," Tsunade said, "But *he's* going to be there...be careful."

Kakashi's eye widened. *What!? Him!?*

D a t t e b a y o

"Look uphead, Naruto," Kushina said, pointing. She was wearing something that looked a cross between a Chinese slip-dress and a cowgirl costume. (You know, what Rushuna from Grenadier wears) "The Land of Dragon's border is right in front of us."

The Uzumaki family had left the Hidden Leaf Village a week before, with Team Guy. But somewhere along the way the two groups had gotten separated.

Naruto did as she told and squinted. The sun was right in front of him, obscuring his vision somewhat.

"What's that," he asked, pointing ahead, "A mountain range?"

"Naw," Kushina shrugged, "That's the wall."

"Wall!?" Naruto cried, giving his mother a wild look, "You gotta be kidding me! Nobody could make a wall *that* big!"

"From what I hear, it took them a while," Kushina admitted. "Now, come on! We're burning daylight."

As they got closer to the wall, Naruto noticed that they were passing more and stranger looking people.

"Mama, who are these freaks?" Naruto asked, looking around. He could have sworn he saw a man in a panda costume...

"They're entrants, just like you." Kushina answered.

"All of them?" Naruto laughed. "Doesn't the Land of Dragons get *normal* tourists?"

"Sure, but they can't come in this way," Kushina explained, "There's only one tunnel through the Great Dragon Wall, and only entrants of the tournament can use it. Everyone else has to come in by boat."

Naruto shook his head, unable to comprehend it.

Later, after pushing and shoving their way through a crowd of warriors, nearly starting several fights, Naruto found himself signing up at a check station. However, Naruto had trouble reading the highly technical registration form, Kushina took over, allowing Naruto's mind to wander.

Man... Look at all these weirdos... Naruto thought, looking around. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw that guy in the panda mask signing up. *Am I up against all of them?*

"Naruto? Son?" Kushina's voice pulled him out of his thoughts. He looked over to see Kushina holding out the form to him. "We need your signature, sweetie."

D a t t e b a y o

One short walk later, the Uzumaki family had entered Hadoken, where the Dragon Belt always took place, along with numerous other sporting competitions. Normally a relatively safe and quiet city, every six years it would become the location of hundreds of street fights. With the conflicting personalities of the dozens of fighters entering the country, it was a miracle a war hadn't broke out. Ironically, these civil disturbances were the easiest for the local police to deal with, as they would tell the fighters to "Save it for the tournament." And they always did.

"Son, I'm going to get us set up at our hotel," Kushina decided, taking all the bags, "You go explore the town, take in the local color." She handed Naruto a piece of paper. "When you're done, just come to this address. But don't stay out too late!" She warned.

And with that, Kushina left. Naruto looked at the address she had given him.

"I wonder where this place is," Naruto muttered, "Why didn't mama give me directions as well?"

"Oh yeah!" Kushina said, popping out of nowhere. She held out something to him. "You can't wear armor in this contest, so your forehead protector is out. Get used to wearing this."

Naruto took what was given to him. It was like his normal Leaf headband, minus the metal piece that had the Leaf symbol carved in. In place of that was a yellow spiral sewn in. After a moment, Naruto swapped forehead coverings.

"Okay, see ya!" And once again, mama was gone.

Now what do I do... Naruto thought, a little winded. Not really paying attention, he wandered aimlessly around until he came upon a street vendor.

"Hey, kid! You here for Dragon Belt?" the somewhat shifty-looking vendor asked, "Wanna buy a souvenir?"

"Um... Okay," Naruto answered, facing the vendor, "Whaddya got?"

"Here, try a Chocolate Dragon," the vendor said, holding out a wrapped bar to Naruto.

Naruto took the package and paid the vendor. Opening the wrapper, Naruto saw that the Chocolate Dragon was simply a thin slab of chocolate the size of a graham cracker with a picture of dragon shaped into the chocolate. Taking a bite, Naruto's face scrunched. It didn't taste like chocolate...

"Also comes with Dragons of the World trading card," The vendor adding, "See what kind you got."

Naruto reached inside the wrapper and sure enough, there was a card that said Dragons of the World , with an oroboros surrounding the words. Looking at the other side, he saw a picture of...Kushina!

"Ohhh, you get 'Red Queen' Kushina!" The vendor said excitedly, looking over Naruto's shoulder. "She first woman to win tournament,

you know."

Mama won this thing? Naruto thought, and another thought came to him. "Why is her picture on this card?"

"Ohhh, that easy." The vendor shrugged, "Card series features past winners of Dragon Belt. Past 'Dragons' you know."

Naruto felt a rush of excitement come over him. "Which means when I win, they'll make a card for me!"

The vendor raised an eyebrow. "You entering?"

"That's right!"

"Then you should go to the Hall of Dragons," The vendor said, "Learn more about the tournament."

Naruto decided to take him up on that. As he left, the vendor called out, "Wait! Don't you want T-shirt?!"

D a t t e b a y o

The Hall of Dragons, as Naruto discovered, was a gigantic one-room building, filled with dozens of statues and pictures of past winners of the Dragon Belt. The statues were of some of the earliest winners of the Belt, and Naruto wasn't sure which statue looked the worst. Apparently, this was due to the fact that the first Dragons had carved their likenesses from rock themselves, and were notoriously bad artists. After that, they had their visages formed by professionals. As Naruto looked around for Kushina's, he heard something.

"Hmhmhmhm...HMM-hmhmhm..."

I know that song. Naruto thought, turning around. As he tried to find the source of the humming, he came upon the picture of the previous champion. It was a rather muscular, bulky man, who was bald except for thin amount of mustache growing out under his nose. He had a nasty scowl on his face.

Man, what a scary guy. Naruto thought, reading the name under the photo.

Tetsumura Jinmaru: The Ironman

There was some background information listed as well. Apparently, Jinmaru was a monk from the Land of Earth, who had a technique that could make his body as hard as iron, hence his nickname.

...Naruto whistled. According to this, he had won all of his matches in under two minutes. And according to the diagram of the match line-up for the main tournament, one of those matches was against...Uchiha Itachi? *That* Uchiha Itachi?

After his initial shock, Naruto thought about it. From what he knew, Itachi used mostly genjutsu in fights, relying on the hypnotic powers of the Sharingan. Maybe this Jinmaru guy had mastered some training that made him immune to the Sharingan.

Also, there was the fact that almost all ninjutsu experts had glass jaws. It seemed like rule of the world that anyone who was a master of over ten ninjutsu seemed to be lacking in the physical department. In his fight with Neji, he had only gotten one clean punch on Neji... and that was all it took. And it was six years ago. Maybe Itachi wasn't that strong then.

"Binkusu no sake wo..."

There it was again! Looking around quickly, Naruto found the source of the singing. Standing a little ways off to the side was tall, but somewhat hunched-over man, dressed in a brown long coat and wide-brimmed hat. On the back of the coat was a red plus sign.

"Hey, mister!" Naruto called out.

Looking up, the man turned around to face Naruto. He had a face that vaguely reminded Naruto of a monkey he saw in a zoo during his training with Jiraiya.

"Hmm! Yes, what is it, what do you want? Speak quickly, I'm a busy man!" The stranger said, his eyes glinting with a manic expression.

' Psychic' Tai Wan, MD

"Um, yeah," Naruto began, a little off-balance from the doctor's rapid-fire reply, "I was wondering...where'd you hear that song?"

"That?" Wan shrugged, "Just an old song some pirates sang while they were docked in the town I lived in. They were fairly nice bunch...if you didn't get them mad." Wan seemed to be drifting down memory lane without a paddle. "I remember this one time, one of them came to my clinic, needing a shot for something...tetanus, I recall. When I stuck it in him, he nearly loped my head off because it hurt..." As Wan chuckled, he took another glance at Naruto...and stopped. He was now looking at Naruto with such intensity the young ninja had never felt before.

"Kid...what's your name?" Wan asked, a strange (That is, *stranger*) expression on his face.

"Uh, Naruto." The one being asked replied cautiously. He began to think about evasive maneuvers.

"Son of a gun..." Wan whispered, grinning wildly. He gripped Naruto's shoulders and crowed, "Son of a gun!"

"Hey, leggo!" Naruto yelled. He wanted to shake himself free, but couldn't. For some reason he couldn't move his body...

"Man, you've really grown!" Wan laughed, "And it's only been what, sixteen years? Looks like things are working out after all!"

"Hey, do I know you?!" Naruto cried, really getting freaked out. Why couldn't he move!?

"I doubt it!" Wan replied, "You were just a baby when I delivered you!"

"Huh?"

Off to the side, a mysterious pair of eyes watched two with great bloodlust.

There you are...!

D a t t e b a y o

Later, Naruto and Wan were having lunch at an outdoor café. Following the scene at the museum, Wan had explained that he was an old friend of his parents, and offered to buy him a meal. Naruto was now filling him in on what had happened after his birth- doing his best to excluding any references to the Nine-tailed Fox.

"That's awful, kid," Wan commented when Naruto described his childhood. "I told Minato that saving a Hidden Village was a mistake, but he went and did it anyway."

Naruto couldn't believe what he was hearing. "He saved hundreds of innocent lives!" He cried. The Fourth Hokage was one of the greatest heroes in history- And Wan was saying his great deed was a *bad* thing?!

"You don't hold it against him?" Wan asked, raising an eyebrow.

"No!" Naruto said, firmly. Then, a little more softly, he said, "I mean, I used to...a little. But if he hadn't, the village would have been destroyed. And he died, saving it. How can I hate someone who died while I lived?"

Wan smiled softly. "I'm glad that growing up in a Hidden Village hasn't crushed the kindness in your heart. Most guys with your history would be driven to a murderous vengeance-induced killing spree."

"Don't I know it." Naruto replied. It still disturbed him how he close he came to ending up like Gaara used to be- a hateful, killing machine.

A thought occurred to him. "Why did they hate me? I'm not the Fox."

"That's not the point. It's that the creature that wrecked their home was alive, in some form, and there was nothing they could do about it," Wan explained, "Ninja, I've noticed, are very vengeful. If they can't kill someone in reaction to some slight, they get cranky."

It was at that moment that a shuriken- dripping with some purple substance- came flying out from a pair of bushes on the other side of the street. Just before it hit Wan's neck, it froze in mid-air.

"Now, where did this come from?" Wan asked sarcastically. With an almost lazy wave of his hand, a young man, in ninja uniform, burst out from the bushes, tumbling toward Naruto and Wan, moved by some invisible force.

"What's going on?!" Naruto whispered, trying to make sense of the situation.

"Oh, the usual," Wan shrugged, "I'm being blamed for some catastrophe. But which one, I wouldn't know."

"Yes you would!" The ninja yelled, angrily, "It's because of you that Ishiwaka the butcher wiped out my comrades! If you hadn't helped him..."

"What's this about a butcher?" Naruto asked, confused.

"Ishiwaka..." Wan looked thoughtful, "Ah! I remember him! Found him in a river, mauled beyond belief. Would've died if I hadn't helped him."

"He should have died!" the assassin roared, "He was a missing-nin, a renegade ninja, a mass-murderer... *and you helped him!* "

Wan shrugged. "What do you want? I'm a doctor. I help the ill and injured get back on their feet- But I cannot tell them where to go. If

you have anything to blame for what happened to your fellows, blame the system that made Ishiwaka."

Suddenly, the assassin's hidden weapons- and his clothes- were ripped from his body.

"I'll be taking these," Wan said, folding the blades in the rags, "If you hold too many poisoned weapons, you'll get sick. I've seen it happen." Turning to Naruto, he said, "Well, it was nice meeting you, Naruto, but I'd better be going. I have to dispose of these things properly. Good luck in the tournament!"

"But..." Naruto wanted ask Wan more, wanted to keep talking. He wanted to know something...but what?

"I'll catch up with your mom later, don't worry about it!" Wan waved, walking off.

Soon, Wan was out of sight. Naruto looked at the disgraced assassin, now clad in his tighty-whities.

"Your bill, sir." A waiter said, handing Naruto a piece of paper.

Then it hit him. Wan never paid for their meal, and Naruto *still* didn't know where the hotel was!

(A/N: Whew! This chapter went longer than it needed to! I admit, I really had no idea where to go with this one. I just wanted to get Naruto into the Dragon Country and for him to meet Tai Wan (That's a pun...if you don't get it, nevermind.). And in case you didn't notice, a lot of the Land of Dragon's is based on China...veeery loosely based. Also, one Lord Martiya asked if any One Piece characters will be appearing...and the answer is YES! And he's already been seen... Next time, the Dragon Belt opening ceremony!)

The Dragon Belt Opening Throw

Kishimoto owns Naruto

Opening theme: Zudadadan Kinnikuman (Opening theme for *Kinnikuman: Scramble for the Throne*)

Chapter 5: Dragon Belt Opening Throw

Tenkaichi Stadium, 4:00AM. The place where the Dragon Belt was to take place.

The sun wasn't up, but Naruto was already at the stadium. He had gotten up early, hiked all the way from the inn he and Kushina were staying at, and was now sneaking into the premises.

Mama told me that whoever enters the stadium first wins the Belt, NARUTO thought, making his way to the main playing field under cover of darkness. *It sounds like a dumb jinx, but I'll need every bit of help to win this thing!*

As Naruto got to the field, he felt a yawn come on.

Man...I'm tired! I got up at two AM to get here... Naruto looked around. *No one'll mind if I take nap...* Those were his last thoughts as he drifted to sleep.

Hours later, he felt the light of dawn hit his face. Naruto turned over to try and shade himself, when he felt something touch his arm.

"Mmm..." Naruto groaned, and unconsciously pulled away.

"Mmm..." A voice replied.

After a few minutes, Naruto sat up, rubbing his eyes. Off to the side, he heard someone yawn.

"Good morning, Naruto," Lee's voice said.

"Mornin', Lee." Naruto answered without thinking, his mind still in a sleep-induced fog. Suddenly, the fog cleared. "Lee!?"

Yawning, the Handsome Devil of the Hidden Leaf Village stood up and began to stretch. "I see you heard about the jinx too, Naruto?" Lee asked, "So did we."

"We'?"

Soon the field became illuminated enough for Naruto to see the rest of the field. All over the place there were different people, sleeping, waking up, or getting into arguments.

"WHAT!?" Naruto screamed, his eyes bulging.

"I really do not know who showed up first," Lee admitted, "But it is a funny coincidence, is it not?"

"No!" Naruto yelled. So much for the jinx!

"Hey... would you guys pipe down?" A sleepy, but decidedly feminine asked.

Naruto and Lee looked over to see a young woman lying opposite of them. She wore a wrapping costume similar to Yuuhi Kurenai, minus the sleeves. She had tanned skin, blonde hair, eyes like pools...and a chest like a pair of melons. On her shoulder was a Hidden Sand symbol tattoo.

"It's the crack of dawn..." She yawned, stretching back. This had two noticeable effects. Her chest was pushed out, and Naruto and Lee took notice.

"Sorry." They muttered, their eyes fixed on her...eyes.

D a t t e b a y o

Hours later, the stadium was a flurry of action all over as people rushed around. Visitors trying to find their seats, vendors peddling their wares, and on the field, entrants were getting ready for the contest or just chatting around.

"I can't believe you actually tried to get here first," Tenten said, shaking her head, "Do you really believe that stupid jinx?"

"Them and many others," Neji commented, looking around. He saw someone coming and raised an eyebrow. "Look who's here."

"Hey, guys!" Temari yelled, running over to them. "I had a feeling you'd be here." She gave Tenten a smug look. "Hope we don't fight...be a shame if you'd get booted out early!"

"Don't get cocky," Tenten said, giving Temari a mean smile. "I've become a lot stronger- I'll tear you apart if we fight."

"Oh, yeah?"

"Are you the Sand's representative, Temari?" Neji asked, hoping to prevent a catfight (Because he's cool like that).

Temari nodded. "I and another kunoichi were selected to enter the Dragon Belt on behalf of our Village," She explained, "I think she came here earlier..."

Lee pointed. "Is that her?"

Neji, Tenten, and Temari looked to where Lee was pointing. That girl Naruto and Lee met at dawn now had Naruto's face pushed into her chest, and was squeezing tight.

"So *you're* the sweetie that saved Lord Gaara!" She cooed, swinging back and forth, "You're even cuter than they said you were!"

Naruto would have appreciated this more if he wasn't in danger of suffocation. "Na' kyu... ha'some..." He moaned from somewhere within her cleavage.

Watching this, Temari sighed. "Yup, that's her. Muneko is one on of the best kunoichi in the village...but she has this weird fetish about cats. She'll go after anyone with cat-like features, such as ears, paws..." She smirked, "Or whiskers."

"Ah." Team Guy said simultaneously. That was it.

"Let me see those cute whiskers again!" Muneko squealed, pushing Naruto out of her chest, allowing him to catch his breath. Before he could get his bearings, Muneko pressed her lips down onto his cheek.

SMOOCH!

"Sooooo cute!" She giggled. Looking up, she saw Temari and Team Guy staring at her. "Oh, hey, Temari," She said in a more serious tone, "Did you get a good look at our opposition?"

Temari shrugged. "Sort of. It's hard to figure out who has strength or is just fodder for the prelims. We won't be fighting anyone until we've been knocked down to eight, so why bother?"

Muneko shook her head. "That sort of naïve thinking will cost you victory. It's important to know what the competition can do, even before the main tournament. Sabotage between the entrants isn't uncommon." She got up and walked away. "I'm going to give everyone here a once-over. Bye, Whiskers."

Naruto stared at her departing body with a glazed look in his eyes. "Buh...bye..." Shaking himself out of his heat-induced daze, he suddenly remembered where he was. "Man, I'm not used to that... Hey! Temari! You're entering too!?"

Temari sweatdropped.

"Ha! There you are, Uzumaki Naruto!" A voice broke in. Everyone present looked to see a teenage about Naruto's age stomp up to Naruto. He wore a standard ninja uniform, though it seemed a little

torn in some places. On his forehead was some kind of underwater breather mask. He had wavy hair similar to Kakashi's.

"Heheh..." The newcomer chuckled darkly. "So we meet again, Naruto! I'd recognize those stupid whiskers anywhere."

Naruto stared uncomprehendingly. "Who are you?"

The newcomer snarled, "It's me! Oboro, the Rain Ninja!"

Naruto didn't react.

"We fought in the Chunin Exam 3 years ago!" Oboro continued, even more vexed, "Remember!?"

Naruto thought about it. "I remember beating up some Rain Ninja that time... Did you know them?"

"ARGH!"

D a t t e b a y o

"I wonder who's talking to Naruto down there." Sakura wondered.

She and the rest of Team 7 arrived at the Stadium, and were quickly hustled up to their seats.

"If we were closer, I could tell you what he's saying," Kakashi said, tapping the area where his headband covered his sharingan. "Too bad we can't get better seats."

If there were seats farther away from the field, they were probably outside the stadium. Team 7 had the poor fortune to be placed in the very last row, all the way near the outer wall of the stadium. As such, the Leaf Ninja were forced to watch the events in the field...through binoculars.

"Why can't we hide around the field?" Sai asked, "With the right camouflage, no one would notice..."

Yamato shook his head. "No, we'll be noticed," He said, "If the security's as good as it was six years ago, there's no way any of us would make it three steps past without being caught," Yamato pulled up the leg of his pants to reveal a scar, "I found that out the hard way. Only competitors and tournament staff are allowed onto the field."

Sakura thought about this. "So... What about Ms. Kushina?"

"I'm sure she's around somewhere," Kakashi said, "Knowing her, she got an old friend to sneak her in."

"Do you think she has friends around here?" Sai asked.

"Kushina has old friends *everywhere* ," Kakashi assured, "During the 3rd Ninja War, she traveled all over...sometimes dragging my first team along for the ride." Kakashi laughed, "Those were the days..."

Besides him, a man grumbled, "I can't believe I paid good money for this...I'd get a better view in my living room!"

Kakashi was used to hearing people in this row complain, but this man's statement had his curiosity aroused.

"What do you mean by that?" He asked, turning to the man.

The complainer raised an eyebrow as he took in Kakashi. "Didn't you know?" He said, "This is the first Dragon Belt to be aired on television... *Everyone* will be watching."

D a t t e b a y o

In the Hyuuga Manor, Hyuuga Hiashi, leader of the clan, walked toward his living room. The Dragon Belt was going to be on shortly, and he wanted to see Neji in it. Luckily, he had a new big screen to view the whole contest in high definition...

"Choji! Don't eat all the popcorn now!"

...What he hadn't expected was to see Hinata and the rest of her classmates all piled around, his once clean and noble living room transformed into a teen party. Drinks and bowls of snacks were scattered around, and Kiba and Ino were trying to keep Choji from getting near any... 'trying' being the key word. Hiashi stood in the doorway, shell-shocked, until Akamaru barked at his arrival- Wait a minute, who let that mutt on the sofa!?

"Oh, hey, Lord Hyuuga!" Kiba called, holding a bowl of pretzels away from Choji, "What's up!"

Hiashi stared at the scene before him, rendered speechless, until he found his voice. "Don't you have missions today?" He asked, trying to keep his voice calm.

"Yeah, we just finished them," Shikamaru said, lying against the couch, his eyes shut. "Choji suggested we watch the Dragon Belt prelims with our free time."

"My team, ah, had the same idea after we arrived home," Hinata said, a little embarrassed at her former classmates, "When I mentioned you had this big screen... you almost never use it, so I thought it would be okay..."

"It's almost on," Choji said, making another swipe at a snack bowl, "Pull up a chair and join us! You want to watch Team Guy fight, right?"

Akamaru barked.

"Yeah, that's right!" Kiba laughed, "We forgot! Naruto's in this, too!"

Of course, that's right- *Naruto* . Who could forget him? While Hiashi was forced to change his opinion on the Jinchuuriki after beating Neji, and how he helped the Sand, he still couldn't help but be irked by the boy. As a Hyuuga, he felt he was setting an example for the Village to follow- instead, it seemed that most of the impressionable younger generation was following Naruto's...what started as a freak

happenstance with the 3rd Hokage's grandson was turning into an epidemic. There seemed to be a contest for chief trouble-maker at the academy right now.

Sighing, Hiashi sat down in a chair.

"Come on!" Kiba yelled at the TV, "Start the show!"

Hiashi sighed. Was it too late to have the clan secede from the Village...?

D a t t e b a y o

" Live, from Budokai Stadium, it's the 17 th Dragon Belt Championship!"

Everyone in the audience cheered.

" I'm Taromaru Ari, you're friendly commentator, age 38, Virgo! I enjoy watching sports and gambling!"

"WHO CARES!?!?" Boomed the contestants.

" And now, I give you the host of the Dragon Belt, the regional champ in boxing, wrestling, and judo, Chan Ken!"

At the south end of the playing field was a plate form, like a prize podium. On the first place point, there was a puff of purple smoke, and when it cleared, a man was standing there. He dressed simply, wearing jeans, sandals, and an open jacket with katanaka spelling triangle. His hair was black, styled in a wind-blown manner. He had a cocky smile on his face.

"Welcome, warriors!" Ken greeted, looking them over. He paused to wave to the audience. They ate it up, cheering wildly. Turning back to the competitors, he said, "You guys have come all this way to claim the prized Dragon Belt, and with it, the highest ranking. But before we decided which one of you is gonna get it, we gotta figure out who

the *losers* are. And since there are two-hundred and forty-two of you here, that means there are two-hundred and forty- *one losers* ."

In the crowd of entrants, Naruto and his friends stood at the edge, closest to Ken.

"Are there really that many here?" Tenten asked, amazed.

Neji did a quick scan with his Byakugan. "Yup, 242 exactly."

"Before we begin the *brutal* and *humiliating* eliminations, I need to explain something," Ken said, "In the past, there was an order of monks that worshipped dragons, and practiced martial arts. Whenever a hole in their ranks appeared, they would host a series of contests to decide who would become the replacement. Those tests of wisdom, power, and courage would later become this tournament. But you don't care, do you?" Ken asked, sarcastically, "You just want to get started, and so we shall! But first, let me warn you, this won't be easy. In fact, I suspect some of you will die. If any of you want to leave...too late! You signed up, and now you're required to compete under penalty of lawsuit. Sucks to be you!"

A massive amount of killing intent erupted from the mass of competitors, directed at Ken.

"And so, let me announce the first preliminary!" Ken yelled, completely unaffected by the murderous glares. "At the wall, you were each given a badge with a number, am I right? You kept it, right?"

Naruto reached into his pocket and pulled out a red badge with the number 49 printed on it.

"Well, I'm sure you've noticed that the badges are either red or blue," Ken said, "So, I want everyone who has a red badge to pair up with anyone with a blue badge."

Naruto looked around. To his surprise, Team Guy and Temari had red badges as well, and were busy pairing up with other people.

"Hey! Naruto!"

Naruto turned around to see Oboro stomping up to him, a blue badge in his hand.

He shrugged. "Okay, um..." Naruto trailed off.

"Oboro, dammit!" The Rain Ninja yelled, furious, "You... I'm gonna shave you bald and burn that name onto your thick skull!"

"What's your problem?" Naruto asked.

"My *problem* is that instead of being whapped by one of the Leaf Village's genius'," Oboro growled, "I was beat by the village idiot! Do you know how humiliating that is!?"

Naruto was beginning to get angry. "You know, I could really learn to dislike you."

"Alright, everyone paired up?" Ken asked, "Good! Now it's time to announce the event... ROCK, PAPER, SCISSORS!!!"

The entire Stadium shook as everyone face-faulted.

"The HELL!?" Naruto screamed, "Rock, paper, scissors!?"

"That's so STUPID!" Oboro roared.

Ken shrugged. "Hey, you need good instincts to win Rock, Paper, Scissors, and to second guess your opponent."

"I won't do it!" Someone yelled.

"Me neither!" Another roared.

Ken glared. "You know, the more time you spend complaining, the less time we'll have for the *other* prelims. So shut your yaps and get to it."

At that, the unruly competitors faced each other, grumbling.

" *The first preliminary, 'Do Or Die Rock-Paper-Scissors' has begun!*"

"Okay, gang, on three," Ken yelled, "Rock...paper...SCISSORS!"

D a t t e b a y o

"Go, Naruto!" Kushina yelled from her front row seats. She didn't care how dumb the event was (And she knew how dumb it was, we assure you), she planned on supporting her son to the very end. She quickly nudged a girl sitting next to her and pointed at the field.

"You see that kid in the orange and black jumpsuit?" She said eagerly, "That's my son! Isn't he cool!?"

The girl, a red-head with hair that went down past her shoulders (Like Sakura's, originally), gave Kushina a mean look.

"So?" the younger red-head asked, annoyed. She wore a yellow jersey with black blue shorts, along with a baseball cap with musical note covered by a slash.

Tayuya

"So?" Kushina repeated, "Doesn't that show how cool he is! Only the best compete in this show!"

"Yeah, yeah..." Tayuya sighed. She had been putting up with this manic woman ever since she sat down. If she had known this would've happened, she wouldn't have bought tickets! "So, who's this son of yours? You said a jumpsuit, but half of them are wearing suits."

"That one," Kushina said, pointing again, "The blond guy with whiskers."

"Blond? Whiskers?" Tayuya looked to the field and couldn't believe what she saw.

It's him! She thought, amazed, That's the idiot who went chasing after Kimmimaro...! He wasn't killed?

D a t t e b a y o

"Alright! I won!" Naruto cheered, "Paper beats rock!"

"Noooooooo...!" Oboro wailed, falling to his knees.

Off to the side, Team Guy and Temari celebrated their own victories...though not as enthusiastically as Naruto (Except Lee, because he's Lee).

"Okay, everyone done?" Ken asked, "Good! Before we move on to the next event, will all you *losers* please leave the field?"

While half of the competitors left, one from their pack leapt up and charged at Ken.

"I'm not gonna get thrown after this dumb event!" The heavysset man in a karate gi yelled, and jumped up. Ken's response was to catch him, and use his momentum to flip the loser into the air.

" It looks like... Yes, it is! Ken's famous wrestling finisher!"

While the loser was in mid-air, Ken leapt up, and applied a Romero Special hold on him.

" The Spinning Romero!"

As the two fell, Ken let go and tossed the loser into the ground, landing safely on his podium.

Naruto was impressed. "He's good...!"

"To use his opponents momentum against him to perform a judo toss," Lee commented, "And to subsequently perform such a hold without the stability of solid ground... He is truly a master!"

"Anyone else got a complaint?" Ken asked, dusting his hands.

"Didn't think so. For our next event, will our competitors please enter the locker rooms to get changed into their swimsuits? A bus will drop you off at the sight of the next preliminary."

" All audience members, please go to the parking lot, where a bus will take you to the next event."

D a t t e b a y o

In the locker room, Naruto had one question, as he took off his jumpsuit.

"What do you think we'll do now?" He asked Lee.

The fuzzy-brows shrugged. "Who knows. Maybe it won't be so bad, considering this one. How hard can it be?"

D a t t e b a y o

One bus ride later, everyone found themselves on a cliff over looking a beach.

A cliff one thousand feet above the water.

"Oh, snap."

D a t t e b a y o

A/N: Let the games begin! Round one of the Dragon Belt is over, and Naruto, as expected has made it through. The Rock-Paper-Scissors event is a salute to Kinnikuman, whose Choujin Olympics started out the same way.

I added Oboro because I needed Naruto to have an arch-nemesis, someone who can't stand him but isn't dangerous enough to really cause trouble. If he seems out of character, my only explanation is that three years of dwelling on his loss to Naruto (Two losses, if you count the anime fillers... I don't, though).

This was mostly a 'humor' chapter; the next one is gonna be a bit more exciting...

READ! REVIEW! ENJOY!

Jaws of Life

Naruto belongs to Kishimoto

Opening theme: Zudadan Kinnikuman

Chapter 6: Jaws of Life

"Welcome to the second preliminary of the Dragon Belt, taking place here at Toyota Beach! With the competitors stationed at the edge of Ghegis Cliff, one can only wonder what this event will be!"

"That's a good question." Sakura said.

She and the rest of Team 7 had taken the bus ride to the beach, intent on keeping a close on the contest to the end. To better blend in, they had changed from normal mission wear to beach wear. Sakura had worn a pink bikini she claimed would 'magnify her sex appeal'. The men of Team 7 wisely chose not to comment. Sai and Yamato wore swim trunks, Sai in a T-shirt that had a picture of a paintbrush, while Yamato wore a Hawaiian shirt that had a camo-print. Kakashi chose not to wear a shirt at all, only a pair of red trunks. While he had swapped his Leaf headband for an eye patch to cover his sharingan, he still (Much to Sakura's annoyance) wore that mask.

"If I were to guess," The Copy-Ninja said, reading his copy of Make-Out Tactics, "I would say that this is a diving competition. Though, of course," He paused to chuckle at a particularly risqué paragraph in the book, "There's no telling where the Dragon Council will go from there."

Sakura frowned, her large forehead creasing.

"Don't worry, Sakura," Kakashi said, "If nothing else, Naruto's a survivor. He'll be fine."

D a t t e b a y o

On the top of the cliff, Ken had begun his explanation.

"For the second event, we call this little test 'the High Drive Dive'," Ken said, "The rules are simple. From here, you will dive into the ocean, and swim to shore. Once you make it to the beach, you pass."

There were several exclamations of surprise.

"That's it?"

"You had us scared!"

"This'll be easy!"

Those sorts of words continued to be said, until Tenten, dressed in a school swimsuit, who was at the head of the crowd, looked over the edge of the cliff and asked, "What's the ring for?"

Ken grew a devil's smile. "I was hoping someone would ask," He said, "That's where the most sharks are. Try to dive away from it."

"SHARKS?!"

Ken nodded. "That's right. You'll be swimming through shark-infested waters. Try not to get eaten!" Ken then pointed into the water. "See those buoys strategically placed in the water? We call them the 'chicken floats.' If you feel you cannot make it to the shore without being munched on, just climb aboard one of those." Ken held up a finger. "Doing so, however, will eliminate from the Dragon Belt. And so, without further ado, will..." Ken checked a clipboard, "Number 205 step up?"

Number 205 happened to be a tall, muscular man that Naruto and Lee had seen before, and upon seeing him again, they both broke out in a cold sweat. It was Fuji1, one of the bounty hunters who attacked Naruto and Team Shikamaru II near the Land of Waves. He

looked exactly the same, save that his leather outfit had been swapped for a pair of blackswimming trunks. That and the swim cap over his unruly hair.

The bounty hunter gave Ken a mean look before pointing down. "Let me get this straight. If we gotta pass, we hafta jump off a thousand-foot high cliff, into an ocean full of hungry sharks, swim to shore, and if we touch one of them buoys, we're out?"

Ken nodded, smiling mock-sweetly. "And when you're done, you can get a bite at the snack bar."

Fuji sighed. "Here we go again..."

Taking a few steps back, Fuji leapt- and fell. And fell, and fell, and fell...into the ring of floats. After a minute, his head popped out.

"Whew! I made it!" Fuji gasped, looking around. "I didn't see any sharks... Hey! What touched me!?"

That was all Fuji said before being pulled underwater.

Up top, Ken looked at the crowd. "Who's next?"

One by one, more fighters jumped. Some made it, while others didn't. Of those that didn't make it, only a handful were able to climb onto buoys. At the shore, Fuji was spotted trudging out onto the sand, a dead shark in his hand.

D a t t e b a y o

"C'mon, you losers! Swim already!!" Kushina yelled, sitting on a beach towel, clad in a red bikini.

Kushina and Tayuya were now under a beach umbrella. Tayuya didn't understand why she was still with this crazy lady. She had hoped to lose her in the crowd, but Kushina was determined to keep her nearby. Well, determined might not have been the word...

"When do you suppose it'll be Naruto's turn?" Kushina asked Tayuya excitedly.

Tayuya shrugged. "Who knows?" Bored, she pulled out a flute and began to play.

"Wowwww..." Kushina breathed, looking and sounding like a little girl, "You're really good! Do you take requests?"

Tayuya paused. No one in Sound had ever cared about her playing to ask. Usually she was told to shut up or go elsewhere. As annoying as Kushina was, she was one of the few people to take a real interest in her music...without being put under a genjutsu.

She liked that.

D a t t e b a y o

"I can't believe that monster is here," Naruto, in his ramen fishcake-dotted swim trunks, said to Lee, "What are the odds?"

"It could be worse, Naruto," Lee, in his bright green speedo, commented, "His teammates could be in this as well."

"Okay, buddy, hold it right there!" Ken's voice cut into their conversation like a hot knife through butter.

Looking over and around the crowd, Naruto and Lee gaped to see Blind the Buddha, Fuji's partner, in full costume, mask included. That one was standing before Ken, who had a suspicious eyebrow raised.

"Sorry buddy," Ken said, raising a hand in a 'stop' position, "But we're going to have to see what's under that costume. You know, to make sure you aren't carrying anything *illegal*."

"I would rather not..." Blind replied, "I'm...camera-shy."

"Not a problem," Ken shrugged, and pointed towards a changing tent a few yards away. "Just step right in there and we can begin our

check in private."

After a moment's pause, Blind walked into the changing tent, Ken following close behind. For a few seconds, nothing happened. Then, Ken could be heard laughing from the inside.

"Oh-ho-ho man! You're kidding me! That's just awesome!"

Blind and Ken stepped out, the host looking like someone told him about a big prank that was about to be played.

"You're clean," He said to Blind, patting the Buddha on the shoulder. "Now jump in there!"

As Blind dove, Naruto turned to Lee, tears streaming down his face. "That one's here too..."

Lee sweatdropped. "What are the odds?"

More people went over the cliff, and soon it was Neji's turn. Neji, dressed in blue-striped swim trunks, casually approached the edge of the cliff.

"Go for it, Neji!" Naruto yelled.

"Use the power of your youth!" Lee hollered.

But Neji didn't hear them. There was a nagging thought in his head; why weren't the highly skilled ninja entering using the Walking-On-Water Technique?

"Good luck, dude!" Ken grinned, patting Neji on the shoulder.

Giving Ken a cool look, Neji dove from the cliff. As he plummeted down, he tried to focus his chakra to his feet...but couldn't!

What the...?! Was Neji's last thought before hitting the water. He didn't have much time to think underwater, as he saw a shark coming at him.

Hakke Kūshō! Neji thrust out his palm, planning to send the sea-born predator flying away, only for nothing to happen- the shark simply rammed into his hand, sending the Hyuuga tumbling in the water.

What is going on here!? Neji thought desperately, as more sharks swarmed around him.

D a t t e b a y o

"Something's wrong," Sakura said, worried, "Why hasn't Neji come out of the water yet?"

"Probably for the same reason the most of the other ninja never came out." Kakashi said.

"What do you mean, Kakashi-Senpai?" Yamato asked.

"I've noticed that before each fighter jumps, Ken touches them on the same place," Kakashi explained, "It's possible that Ken uses that moment to block the flow of chakra, preventing them from performing the Walking-On-Water technique."

"He must be more skill than his outer appearance suggests," Sai noted, "I assumed he was just a stupid celebrity."

"Oh my gosh!" Sakura shrieked, "Neji!"

Out in the sea, Neji was spotted climbing onto a buoy...with a visible red spot on his leg.

"Looks like one of the sharks got him." Sai commented.

Sakura was already on the water, racing towards Neji at top speed.

D a t t e b a y o

"I can't believe Neji lost..." Naruto murmured.

"That's the way this tournament is," A voice said behind him, "It shows who has strength who's only pretending to be strong."

Naruto turned around-

Thump

And got a face full of cleavage.

"Hi, cutie-whiskers," Muneko winked, "Having a good time?"

"Mmf!" Naruto pushed himself out of the Sand kunoichi's bountiful chest and looked her over. She was now wearing a skimpy white bikini, with paw prints on the top. It seemed to be trembling under the pressure of holding her full figure.

"Muneko!" Lee said, blushing slightly, "I see you passed the first event!"

"Mmm," Muneko shrugged, "It was easy. My opponent was too busy staring at my chest to make a sign, so I claimed he was doing rock while I did paper."

Naruto and Lee sweatdropped. They weren't sure if that was cheating or not...

"Number 87!" Ken called out, "You're up!"

"That's me." Muneko walked off toward the edge of the cliff, swaying her hips as much as possible. When she stopped before Ken, he gave wink to the camera and said, "Not too shabby."

Muneko went over and passed, as did Tenten, Lee, and Temari, though not in that precise order. Many others dived, and so everyone had gone over...

...Except for Naruto.

D a t t e b a y o

" *Lastly, Whirlpool Country's Uzumaki Naruto!*"

"Naruto's turn at last," Sakura sighed, looking up from Neji's leg.

Team Guy had joined Team Kakashi under the umbrella, with Neji's leg bandaged. Sakura had healed it, but it still needed time to properly recover.

"Why did that Ari person say, 'Whirlpool Country'?" Sai asked, "Shouldn't he have said, 'Hidden Leaf's Uzumaki Naruto'?"

"That does seem like an odd mistake to make." Tenten commented.

Kakashi shook his head. "Knowing Kushina, it wasn't a mistake. She probably filled out Naruto's form for him. She always believed her homeland was superior to ours."

D a t t e b a y o

"Wooooo! Alright, Naruto!" Kushina cheered, "Go for it, son!"

Tayuya, despite her best efforts not to, found herself cheering as well.

"Don't drown, idiot!" She hollered, cupping her hands around her mouth.

D a t t e b a y o

Up on the cliff top, it was just Naruto and Ken...and Oboro. Using his genjutsu, Oboro had snuck along with the crowd, and was now hiding himself, juuust out of sight. Now he would have his revenge!

Naruto did not know this, as he looked over the cliff, down at the shark-infested waters below.

"I'm going to die now," Naruto said to Ken, "If I jump, I am *totally* going to die now."

After a moment, Naruto walked back. Ken (And Oboro) raised an eyebrow. Was Naruto, the ultimate determinator, actually going *give up*?

Then, whirling around, Naruto *charged* , screaming a mighty (And somewhat deranged) battle cry...sounding very much like a deranged breed of rabbit.

"AAAAAAAAAAHHHHH!!!" NAruto roared, taking the jump,
"RAAAAAAAAAHHH- OW!"

That last part of his battle-cry was due to the kunai Oboro had thrown at him. It just nicked him, but the cut was deep enough to draw blood.

...What a minute, *blood*?

...Was that bad...?

It was only after Naruto hit the water that he realized yes, blood was bad. After all, it attracted sharks!

Crap! Naruto thought, and scrambled to the water surface, *Gotta use Walking-On-Water technique!*

However, no matter how hard he tried, he couldn't walk on water.

Arrrrgh! Naruto looked around to see a pack of hungry sharks swarming around him, looking...hungry. *Why does my chakra control have to cope out NOW?!*

Naruto would've simply swum for his precious (And, thanks to the Fox, extended) life, but the sharks were coming in at all sides. He focused as hard as he could.

C'mon...C'MON!!

D a t t e b a y o

"Contestant Naruto does not seem to be surfacing. Could this be the last day for the last entrant?"

"No..." Kushina said wistfully, staring out at the water, "Naruto..."

Tayuya couldn't help but feel sorry for her (In her opinion) nutty companion. "Kushina..."

Rrrrrrrumble...

"Ah, this is odd... There seems to be something forming in the water... A whirlpool!?"

Yes, there was a large whirlpool in the water! The water spun, and spun, causing sharks to be tossed about instantly. Then, as quickly as it started, it stopped. Then, the water began to implode.

Silence...

KA-SPLOOOSH!!!!

Then it *exploded!* As a result the biggest wave seen on television was heading towards the shore.

"Sweet mama llama! What's going on!?"

"It's Naruto!" Sakura cried, eyes going wide.

Indeed, on the back of a somewhat dazed shark, Naruto surfed towards the shore.

"Cowabunga!" He cried. As he and the wave raced towards the shore, beach-goers quickly dove for cover, hoping to avoid the incoming surge of water.

SPLASH!

They were too late. The entire beach, and everyone on it, was hit by the tidal wave, sending everything askew in watery heap.

"How..." Tenten began, trying to get her bearings, "How did he do it? Didn't Ken block his chakra flow too?"

"He did," Answered Kakashi, checking to see if his copy of Make Out Tactics was dry. It wasn't, but he hoped it would recover soon. Very soon. "But Naruto's been dealing with poor chakra control his entire life... I doubt what Ken does affected him that much."

Neji looked over to where Naruto had landed. His head was stuffed into the sand, but Kushina a strange red-headed girl the Hyuuga didn't recognize were busy pulling him out. Just then, Ken drove by in dune buggy, Oboro in the passenger's seat.

"Okay, winners!" Ken announced, "Since you're all a bit waterlogged, we'll be taking a quick, fifteen minute break. Then, back to the stadium!"

As the host drove off, Naruto spat out some sand. "Did I win?"

Dragon Belt 2 nd Preliminary -

Passed- 25

Gave up- 40

Eaten- 56

D a t t e b a y o

A/n: Second trial...done! Quite honestly, I got the idea of a shark-infested cliff dive from *Total Drama Island* , a Canadian cartoon mock of reality shows. My version, I admit, is a bit more bloody... no one got eaten on that episode. This is certainly a switch from the silly event in the last chapter... that was intentional. The next event will be less gory, I assure you, though. Oh, and someone asked how come Tayuya is still alive...I will answer that soon enough, I assure you...soon enough..

Hakke Kūshō : Eight Trigrams Empty Palm

Review, please! I require LOTS of reviews!

1 See Quest For Mama

Ramen Delivery Final

Kishimoto owns Naruto. Eiichi Oda owns a certain character.

Opening theme: Zudadan Kinnikuman

Chapter 7: Ramen Delivery Final

"Welcome back to Budokai Stadium, where the final preliminary for the Dragon Belt will begin! The fighters are back in uniform, eagerly waiting whatever task they must perform to enter the main tournament!"

"Man, why do we have to do this now?" Naruto moaned, rubbing his stomach, "I'm starving!"

A fighter next to him, and tall, lean, dark-skinned man from the Land of Lightning with an afro, looked at him and asked, "Didn't you get lunch at the beach?"

"I wanted to, but there was a HUGE line at the snack bar!" Naruto groaned, "I wish I had some ramen..."

It was at that moment that a man in a security uniform, an employee of the championship, handed Naruto a bowl of steaming hot Ramen. He then gave one to the afro guy. Naruto didn't waste time, and began wolfing it down. Afroman stared at his bowl, looked up at the sky, and yelled, "I wish I had a million ryo!"

"Everyone got their bowls of ramen?" Ken asked, up on his podium, "Good! Then it's time to announce the next event! I call it the 'Ramen Delivery Race!'"

Naruto looked up from his (Now empty!) bowl of ramen.

"In this little game, you will be running a little marathon," Ken explained, "From here in the Stadium, you will go through town, and

continue on until you get to the top of Shiranui Hill. Upon reaching the Hill, you will be given, as proof of your visit-" Ken held up sickeningly cute plushy version of himself, "-A cuddly, huggable Ken dolly, which will be on sale in our gift shop tomorrow."

The fighters had never wanted to destroy a doll as much as they did right then and there.

"At the same time, you must carry the bowl of ramen we have given you. Try not to spill! Spilling means disqualification," Ken continued, "Get the oh-so-lovable doll, and hoof it back here," Ken finished, "And the first eight will go on to the tournament! Any questions?"

There was a slurping sound, and Naruto soon realized that everyone was staring at him. Looking up from the bowl he was licking clean, Naruto had only one thing to say.

"Seconds?"

D a t t e b a y o

While the fighters lined up for the race, Kushina and Tayuya had gotten back in their seats.

"Go, son!" Kushina cheered. Looking at Tayuya, she asked, "Hey, what's with you? You've been all quiet-like since we got back from the beach."

Tayuya had concerned look on her face, thinking about her little encounter with Naruto after the 2nd preliminary...

" Annnnd HEAVE!" Kushina yelled, as she and Tayuya pulled Naruto out of the sand.

" Oof!" Naruto grunted, and spat out some sand. "Did I win?" He asked, gagging.

" You made it," Kushina smiled, "You're on your way to victory!"

" Alright!" Naruto pumped his arm. It was then he noticed the presence of another red-head. "Hey, who're you?" He asked, eyes squinting. "You look familiar..."

Tayuya frowned. She had hoped he'd be one of those heroic idiots, the kind who'd never remember a face. If he realized she was once a member of Orochimaru's Sound 4, she'd never hear the end of it.

" Naruto, this is Tayuya," Kushina introduced, ignoring the former Sound ninja's discomfort, "I met her in the Stadium."

Naruto hummed, staring intently at Tayuya. Where did she see her before...?

He's gonna recognize me, Tayuya thought, He's gonna remember that red-haired Sound Ninja that was delivering that Uchiha b-tard to Orochimaru...

" I know you!" Naruto cried, pointing a 'finger of truth' at Tayuya.

Here it comes... Tayuya thought, and fingered a knife hidden under the sand.

" You go to Madame Sayuri's School For Girls, in the Land of Water, don't you!?" Naruto exclaimed, grinning.

Tayuya facefaulted.

Back in the present, Tayuya shrugged. Eventually, she would have to deal with her past as a Sound Ninja, but for now...

"Win, you idiot!" She yelled, cupping her hands.

D a t t e b a y o

"Ready... Set... GO!" Ken yelled, ringing a large gong.

BONG!

Twenty-five fighters, powered by their own drive and the cheers of the crowd, charged for the main entrance of the stadium, somewhat inhibited by the bowls of ramen they were carrying.

"And they're off! There's a massive pack heading for town, but we'll see who're the leads soon enough, and... Hmm? It seems that one of them is trailing behind! Why, it's Whirlpools' Naruto! What's wrong with him?"

What was wrong was that Naruto was experiencing stomach cramps. Having inhaled a bowl of ramen not five minutes before the start of the race, he had not time to properly digest his meal.

"Stupid...ramen..." Naruto groaned, clutching his tummy, "Why didn't they tell me it wasn't for eating before Ken started talking?!"

D a t t e b a y o

"Jeez..." Sakura grumbled, looking at the action through the Stadium screen, "What's Naruto doing? That idiot! He's lagging behind!"

"Perhaps he ate the ramen and is now having stomach problems." Sai commented.

Meanwhile, Kakashi and Yamato had more on their minds than the race.

"Are you sure about that, Tenzo?" Kakashi asked intently.

Yamato nodded, ignoring the usage of his true name. "I am. That girl with Kushina is one of Orochimaru's bodyguards. I saw her with him when he killed the Third Lord."

"According to Shikamaru's report from three years ago, she was killed by Temari..." Kakashi muttered, "So how is she alive..." *Could it be his doing?*

"It's started, *senpai* ." Yamato's voice broke Kakashi out of his thoughts. He looked to the screen.

D a t t e b a y o

Just outside the city limits...

"If I lose this event, I will perform five hundred squats!" Lee huffed, keeping a protective grip on his ramen bowl.

Next him, a large, muscular man with a handle bar mustache in wrestling shorts gave him a nasty look. Lee had been saying stuff like that throughout the entire race, and he had *had it*.

"I'm tired of your voice, little leaf-brow!" He growled, and swung his legs out in an attempt to slug Lee. Lee, having anticipated this sort of thing, jumped out of the way. The intended kick got a young man in a pink gi.

"Awk!" Pink Gi cried, and had to contort his body into an awkward manner to avoid losing his ramen bowl. "You jerk! Let's get it ON!"

Pink Gi and Mustach began to duke it out, looking awkward as they were also holding bowls of ramen while doing so. It wasn't long before the violence snowballed.

" Uh-oh! It looks like fighting has FINALLY broken out among the contestants!"

And how. It seemed as if every other fighter was determined to knock the other guy's ramen bowl hands. Naruto, by some trick of karmic protection, was ignored. He was so busy running while half doubled over in pain from stomach cramps, that this actually made him inconspicuous enough to avoid confrontation. It also allowed him to eat more of his opponents ramen, but only made his stomach pain WORSE.

This event is both a god-send and a curse... Naruto thought, tossing a now-empty bowl of ramen aside.

Up ahead, Tenten flung something at Temari, who managed to avoid losing her ramen.

"Hey!" Temari cried, jumping away. Landing a ways from Tenten, she yelled, "I thought weapons weren't allowed!"

Tenten smirked. " *Steel* weapons aren't allowed," She whipped out a wooden sword, "These weapons are made of wood!"

"That's an interesting loophole," Temari remarked, pulling out her fan, which was also made of wood. "I guess there's a brain aiming those things inside your head, huh?"

A vein on Tenten's forehead appeared. "I'll make you eat those words, fan girl!"

Making sure that their bowls of ramen were placed in safe locations, the two kunoichi went at it. However, because they were so determined to beat the crud out of each other, neither of them noticed Naruto running by, eating their ramen as he pass them.

D a t t e b a y o

The first to arrive at the halfway point on Shiranui Hill was Rock Lee, who had decided that running with weights on was stupid and had removed them.

At the check station, there was a table of adorable-yet-creepy Ken dolls, as well as a water cooler.

"Welcome, Mr. Rock," An attendant said, and held out a glass cup. "Would you like a refreshment?"

"Yes, I would!" Lee replied exuberantly, and downed the drink in a single gulp. "Mm! Lemonade!"

"Here is your doll, sir." The attendant gestured to a Ken doll with a tag that said 'Rock Lee' on it on the table nearby.

"Thank you!" Lee exclaimed, and grabbed the doll. As he picked it up, he couldn't help but say, "Are the dolls supposed to be this heavy?"

"Each doll is designed to weigh twice as much as the person carrying them." The attendant explained.

"Oh, that makes sense," Lee commented, "It doesn't weigh as much as my ordinary weights, so, it's not a problem."

As Lee ran off, the attendant pulled out a portable radio transceiver.

"Mr. Ken," She said into it, "I think your idea isn't going to work out as well as you thought. We've got some real monsters in this show!"

D a t t e b a y o

Eventually, every fighter who hadn't been eliminated had gotten their Ken doll and was on their way back to Stadium.

...Everyone except for Naruto, who had just arrived.

"Made it!" Naruto gasped. Who knew running while having stomach cramps would be so exhausting?!

"Would you like a refreshment?" The attendant asked, holding out a glass cup.

"Sure!" Naruto yelled, and zipped past her. He tore the water cooler off and began to chug it down. Within thirty seconds the entire container was empty.

Tossing it aside, Naruto said, "Where's my doll?"

She held out a Ken doll with a tag that said 'Naruto' on it. Naruto looked at it, shuddered, and picked it up. He immediately noticed that it weighed twice as much as he did. He knew of course, from having continuously used his clones as projectiles, and wasn't put off by the extra weight at all. He was, however, a little annoyed at

having to hold both a heavy doll in one hand and a bowl of ramen he wasn't allowed to eat in another. He took a few steps forward before realizing how far behind he had fallen.

"Aww! Who am I kidding!" Naruto wailed, "I'll never get back in time!"

"In that case, you wanna talk needlepoint?" the attendant asked. She was a high-school part-timer, and Naruto was pretty cute...

Suddenly, an idea came to Naruto.

"I've got it!" Naruto cried, setting the bowl and doll down. He began to form handsigns.

D a t t e b a y o

At the Stadium, seven positions in the final eight had been filled, Lee included.

" And so, with the first seven decided, we can only wait for the last fighter to arrive!"

Lee, no longer holding a ramen bowl or Ken doll, looked to the main entrance of the Stadium. In the distance, he could barely make out a small crowd charging in.

Naruto... He thought, Hurry up, or you'll be eliminated!

" The racers are coming in, and it looks like it'll be a photo finish!"

Ken was busy striking poses, while a man from the local newspaper was taking pictures.

"Okay, now let's see that left profile!" the photographer was saying, readying his camera. "Excellent!"

Rumble, rumble...

"Er, what's that sound?" the photographer asked, curiously. The ground was starting to shake...

Ken stopped posturing and frowned. "It sounds like a cattle stampede to me."

The rumbling got louder and louder, to the point that everyone in the Stadium felt the shaking. It wasn't until the small crowd of fighters were in the Stadium did the source of the tremors was revealed.

" Dear lord! It's a mob of bad fashion sense!"

"It's Naruto!" Kushina screamed from her seat.

Actually, it was a horde of *Naruto clones!* The Kage Bushin mob stampeded over all opposition, crossing the finish line with the grace and dexterity of meteor collision. When the dust settled, only Naruto-the REAL Naruto, ramen bowl and Ken doll in hand, was left. The crowd went wild.

" U-Uzumaki Naruto wins! That completes the Final Eight! The Dragon Belt Preliminaries are done!"

Kushina, grudgingly accompanied by Tayuya, leapt from her seat and rushed up to Naruto. They, along with Rock Lee and Muneko, began throwing Naruto into the air.

D a t t e b a y o

"Naruto did it!" Kiba cheered.

"He's in the tournament!" Whooped Choji.

Hinata could barely contain tears of joy. Off to the side, forgotten by the celebrating teens, Hiashi could only cover his eyes in dismay. This was not going to be a dignified tournament, he was sure of it...

Dragon Belt Championship Quarter-Finalists;

Wong Sado (Land of Grass)

Muneko (Hidden Sand Village)

Rock Lee (Hidden Leaf Village)

Yang-Chen (Land of Waterfalls)

Uzumaki Naruto (Land of Whirlpools)

Fuji (Land of Earth)

Blind the Buddha (Unknown)

Pandaman (Unknown)

D a t t e b a y o

A/N: Okay! Naruto is IN! Not that there were any doubts on that.
BTW, Shiranui Hill is a reference to Mai Shiranui from Fatal Fury and King of Fighters. Nothing much to say except...

READ!

REVIEW!

PLEASE!

Disco Lottery

You know what? I'm not even gonna say it. You've heard it all before.

Opening Theme: Zudadan Kinnikuman

Chapter 8: Disco Lottery

"I'm in the Dragon Belt!" Naruto cheered.

"Me too!" Lee hollered.

Following the end of the Dragon Belt Preliminaries, Naruto and Lee were celebrating their official entrance to the main tournament at an outdoor café, along with Kushina, Tayuya, and Team Guy. Team Kakashi was there as well, as Kushina apparently didn't realize they weren't trying to be seen and called them out. Naruto had been pretty annoyed that they had been sent to, in his words, 'baby-sit him'.

"Sorry for not showing ourselves earlier," Sakura apologized, "We didn't want to distract you from the tournament."

Soon, the talk turned to Naruto and Lee's future opponents.

"I'm not sure about that Pandaman person," Yamato said, "But that Wong character is a former Hidden Village ninja."

"Which one?" Lee asked.

"All of them," Kakashi sighed, "He joins and leaves Villages at the drop of the hat. After you left for your training with Jiraiya, he joined the Leaf."

"Why'd he leave?" Naruto asked.

"I think his reason were something along the lines of Tsunade not being cute enough to take orders from," Kakashi remarked.

Sakura shook her head. That guy was too petty to be a good Leaf Ninja anyway.

"What about the other guys, Pandaman, Yang-Chen?" Lee asked.

"Never heard of either of them." Kakashi commented.

"I'm more worried about those two bounty hunters," Naruto muttered, crossing his arms. "For some reason, I've got a price on my head... don't know why..."

"I wouldn't worry for now," Tayuya remarked, drinking the last of her tea, "Most bounty hunters in this thing aren't allow to hunt fellow competitors. They'll wait until you've been eliminated before coming after you."

Neji looked at Tayuya, frowning. While he didn't pay too much attention to her at the beach, now that she was closer did he realize that she looked familiar...very familiar.

"Hey, where's Temari?" Sakura asked then, looking around.

"I think she went back to Hidden Sand," Tenten said, looking a little pleased with herself. "Now that she's been eliminated, there's no point to her staying here."

"Does that mean you'll be leaving too?" Sakura wondered aloud.

While this exchange was going on, Tayuya, hearing Temari's name in polite conversation, grew an ugly, unpleasant smile...one that Neji connected with the foul-mouthed kunoichi of the Sound 4.

While Neji was thinking about this, Yamato and Kakashi were having their own thoughts on Tayuya.

"You've got something from her?" Yamato asked Kakashi in a hushed tone. To his credit, he did not meet Kakashi's eyes, speaking only when pretending to drink.

"Yeah," Kakashi replied, fingering a small piece of cloth. "We'll have Pakkun track her down later."

"Why can't we question her now?"

"Well, Kushina's decided that 'Ta-chan' is her friend," Kakashi replied, "And do you remember the *last time* the Leaf Village messed with one of Kushina's friends?"

"...Let's wait until nightfall."

However, all that planning went straight out the window as Neji decided to play a gamble.

"So..." He said to Tayuya in a casual tone of voice, "How's Orochimaru doing?"

Tayuya shrugged. "Dunno. Haven't seen that farker in years."

The effect of her words was instantaneous. Suddenly, everyone at the table was staring with rapt attention.

"The direct approach works too, I guess," Kakashi conceded, sweating.

"I thought so," Neji grunted, "You're one of the four ninja that were taking Sasuke to Orochimaru, two and a half years ago, aren't you?"

"That's me," Tayuya droned, not really concerned.

"WHAT?" Naruto gaped.

Sakura clenched her fists, a smoldering fire appearing in her eyes. *She's one of the people who took Sasuke-kun away...!*

"But like you said, that was over two years ago," Tayuya continued, "You can't still be upset over a b-tard who would toss his comrades aside so easily, can you?"

That did it. Sakura leapt over the table at Tayuya, her fist in striking position. She would have clocked the former Sound Ninja but good had Kushina not caught the blow.

"Hey, calm down!" the adult kunoichi ordered, "I don't know what's going on, so no one's killing anyone!"

"She's one of those four ninja I told you about, mama!" Naruto yelled, pointing an accusing finger at Tayuya, "She's one of the ninja who took Sasuke to Orochimaru!"

"Oh." Kushina looked at Tayuya. "What was that like?"

Everyone fell over.

"Awful," Tayuya grunted, reseating herself. "Taking that damn snake's orders day-in and day-out, putting up with those idiots in the Sound Four... God, if it wasn't for that curse mark, I would've left AGES ago."

Sakura blinked. "Curse mark?"

"It's a special mutation some of Orochimaru's minions use," Neji explained. He thought back to his fight with that spider-like Sound Ninja. "It apparently grants whoever has it enhanced physical prowess."

"On the downside, it also destroys the users mind the more they call upon it," Kakashi finished.

"That's what we told him," Tayuya interjected, "Me and the rest of the Sound Four had enough free will left to warn Sasuke what he was getting himself into...and he still took the bait. F-ker."

Naruto was tempted to lash out at Tayuya, wanted to strike her, to tell her she had NO RIGHT to slander Sasuke like that...but she was right. Sasuke had, in the end, fell for Orochimaru's sweet talk of easy power at the cost of his humanity.

Instead, he asked, "How'd you survive?"

Tayuya looked up, a far away expression in her eyes. "After that fight... When I woke up, there was a friggin' huge tree lying on top of me, crushing my waist. I thought I'd never escape, I'd never live..."

"So, how did you?" Sakura asked. Angry she was at meeting someone who helped Orochimaru seduce Sasuke, as a medic, she was interested in Tayuya's miracle recovery.

"That," A new cut in, "Was the easy part."

Everyone looked back to see Doctor Tai Wan strolling up to them.

"How ya doin', kid?" Wan waved, a smug expression on his face.

"Ahh! You're the Doc who delivered me!" Naruto cried, pointing.

There was a rush of movement, and suddenly Kushina had Wan a monstrous hug.

"Dr. Tai!" She squealed, "I knew you'd be here, I knew it!"

"Glad to see you too, Kushina," Wan gagged, "But lay off the greetings, I'm not as young as I used to be!"

"You old fraud!" Kushina laughed, squeezing tighter, "You'll outlive us all!"

After separating himself from the snake-like constriction of Kushina's hug, Wan pulled up a chair (though anyone watching saw a chair just bounce up under his seat) and joined the conversation.

"I saw you two idiots in the prelims..." Wan said, clicking his tongue, "Very impressive."

Naruto and Lee tapped fists, grinning.

Kakashi, however, wasn't so happy. "So, you are in this country, Tai Wan..."

"Tai Wan?" Sakura's eyes widened, "I've heard of you! Tsunade-Shishou told me you're an amazing doctor who can cure anything!"

Wan chuckled. "I can see my reputation has reached the younger generation...though it's a bit inflated. I can't cure everything. Just ask Orochimaru," the doctor rubbed his chin in thought, "He was pretty sore when I told him I couldn't fix his arms."

"What?" Sakura shook her head. What was he saying? "O-Orochimaru?"

"You'd helped that b-tard!?" Naruto roared, leaping up.

"Haven't we established in our first meeting I don't care about what a patient does with himself?" Wan asked tiredly, "If I deny an ill or injured man treatment, I'd be denying myself my status as a doctor."

"That's very noble of you," Kakashi said darkly, "But it doesn't change the fact that helping criminals is aiding and abetting. You're just as responsible for any murders they commit."

"As opposed to the assassin right next to me?" Wan asked, sneering. "Then is aiding a murderer more sinful than committing murder itself?"

While Naruto had been initially angry with Wan a few minutes ago, he couldn't help but feel awkward now, sensing the dark feelings being exchanged between the doctor and the Jonin.

"Am I missing something?" He asked, looking between the two.

"This man," Kakashi said, his voice tinged with venom, "protected a missing-nin my squad was tracking...a man who ultimately wiped out my comrades...all for money."

"And your stupid squad saw fit to camp out on the doorstep of my clinic!" Wan roared, standing at full height, pointing an angry finger at Kakashi. "I had to stay on guard for four days, protecting my patient! FOUR DAYS! With no sleep! I couldn't even go to town to get groceries! All to kill someone who was supposed to be resting! You idiots got what you deserved!"

It was at that moment that every ninja present except for Kushina realized how very TALL Wan was at full height. He must have been a good head or so above the tip of Kakashi's hair.

"I may not be the perfect example of virtue, I admit," Wan growled, "But at least I don't kill for *money!* "

Wan sat back down, and an invisible force pulled Kakashi's chair out from under him, causing the Copy-Ninja to slam his chin down on the table.

"Geez, go easy on him, Dr. Wan," Kushina said, "He's just a dumb kid."

"That's just it, Kushina," Wan sighed, "He's just a dumb kid...an example of how screwed-up the world is."

An uncomfortable silence followed.

What happened to Kakashi... thought Sai, It must be that 'psychic power' I've heard about...the kind only he possesses.

"Umm, Dr. Tai?" Sakura broke in plaintively, "You said fixing Tayuya's legs was the easy part, right?"

"That's right," Wan nodded, "But first, who the heck are you?"

"Oh, forgive my manners," Sakura straightened herself up. "I am Haruno Sakura, Medic Ninja of the Hidden Leaf."

"Nice to meet you." Wan said, while thinking, *The Leaf's training new medics? That's new. She looks a bit too violent to be a decent surgeon, though...*

"Thank you," Sakura smiled, "Now, what I wanted to know is, if Tayuya's legs were easy, what was hard?"

"The curse mark," Tayuya sighed, "Took me a whole friggen year to get over it."

"A year?" Neji asked, curious.

"More precisely," Wan explained, "It took four months to replace the skeletal structure beneath her waist, and good eight months to remove the mark, plus recover time from both procedures."

Now, Naruto and Sakura were very interested. If one curse mark could be removed, maybe another could be...

"How'd you do it?" Naruto asked, an eager look in his eyes.

"I'll send you my full notes later," Wan declared, "But for now, I'll say that the procedure involves induced vomiting, scent candles, sweating, and shock therapy."

Tayuya curled up into a little ball and shuddered, reliving a horrible memory.

"...And that doesn't even cover the mental trauma that occurs as a side-effect."

Everyone sweatdropped. Naruto took Sakura aside.

"We're DEFINITELY trying it on Sasuke first chance we get!" he whispered.

"...Speaking of mental trauma," Wan said, getting up, "You'd better get ready for the lottery for the tournament line-up."

"That's right!" Lee cried, punching his fist into his palm, "The lottery! ...What do you mean by mental trauma?"

D a t t e b a y o

The lottery for the tournament took place at a special party, in the hip nightclub, Fei Hung Disco. It was a place where drinks flowed from the tap, music flowed from the speakers, and the lights made anyone who paid too much attention to them very dizzy.

A psychedelic joint, indeed.

Everyone mingled, ate from the buffet, drank at the bar, and just got their groove on. Since it was a nightclub party, no one wore their normal outfits, instead donning clothes that looked like the wardrobe from *Saturday Night Fever*. Up in the disk jockey's booth, a small man with a round head in a bad wig and glasses examined an old record, blowing a thick layer of dust off of it.

Taromaru Ari- Dragon Belt Commentator

Satisfied with his selection, Ari placed the vinyl on the player.

Song: *Go For It (Graham Gouldman)*

Work and work and work and work

Work and work and work and work

Work and work and work and work

You gotta work, you gotta work

Lee, in a stunning white disco suit, danced with Sakura (Could it BE any more perfect, he thought!), who, in comparison, looked utterly bland in a pair of jeans and a pink shirt with Hidden Leaf emblem on

the front. While Sakura was just moving to the beat, Lee was in full disco mode, putting those dance lesson Guy-sensei made him take to improve his coordination to good use.

Friends will try to put you down (Go for it, go for it)

When you wanna go to town (Go for it, go for it)

Elsewhere, Naruto, wearing orange bellbottoms, a yellow shirt, black vest and red cap, was dancing with a cute red head...a cute blond... a cute brunette...and ANOTHER cute blond! Witnessing this, Sai wondered if the Kage Bushin technique was meant for 'playing the field'.

But if you wanna sing this song (Go for it, go for it)

You gotta work out all night long

Off to the side, Ken and Fuji were chatting it up, dressed in stylish clothing. Ken pointed into the crowd, saying something, causing Fuji to burst out laughing hysterically.

You gotta

GO FOR IT

Against the opposition

In the center of the dance floor, Muneko was busy getting her groove on, causing everyone around her, male and female alike, to stare at her flowing curves.

GO FOR IT

If you wanna win the race

Pandaman (Looking less buff than he did during the prelims) poked his head out of the crowd of Muneko's admirers, before ducking back in.

GO FOR IT

It's really your decision

At the bar, Blind drank some very fine wine...with a draw, poking out of the mask.

GO FOR IT

You gotta set the pace

Kakashi looked up from his copy of Make Out Tactics to see Sai tried asking one of the few pretty girls that hadn't a clone of Naruto to dance with for a dance. Looking back to his book, he heard a resounding slap. Looking up, he saw the girl storm away from Sai, who had a hand print on his cheek. Frowning, the emotionless ninja opened a book titled How To Pick Up Chicks and began to flip through the pages.

For inspiration we all need a mama and a papa

' Cause we to find a reason not to work is easier than harder

At a table outside of the dance floor, Kushina, Yamato, Wan, and Tayuya banged frosty mugs of...water...together.

GO FOT IT

Against the opposition

Back at the bar, Oboro glared at Naruto and his many dance partners, clearly annoyed at his self-declared rival's luck. How many guys could get away with going out with multiple girls AT THE SAME TIME?

GO FOR IT

If you wanna win the race

In the DJ's booth, Ari was happily pumping and cranking his arms, getting down with the beat.

GO FOR IT

It's really your decision

GO FOR IT

You've gotta set the pace

And WORK

After the song, the volume of the music lowered. Ken, standing in a cleared-away area of the dance floor asked, "Is everyone having a good time?"

A resounding "YEAH!" filled the disco.

"Good! Then it's time to start the lottery!" Ken yelled, "Will our eight finalists step forward?"

Naruto, Lee, Muneko, and all the rest moved through the crowd. When they got to where Ken was, the cocky martial artist gestured to a strange device next to him. It looked like a gumball dispenser, with a large crank on the side.

"When I call your name out, please come over here and select a ball from the dispenser," Ken explained, "And no, they aren't candy."

That got a few laughs. Naruto had the distinct feeling that last comment was a jab directed at him.

"Wong Sado?"

"Yo." A good-looking young man, a bit younger than Ken, but a bit older than Naruto and Lee, stepped forward. He had dark tan skin and white blond hair, similar to Muneko. He wore an open white jacket and brown pants with fringes.

Wong Sado

Sado strode over to the ball dispenser, and turned the crank. A blue ball, the size of tennis ball, popped out.

"Okay, you've got the blue." Ken nodded, writing it down on a clipboard he suddenly had. "Next, Yang-Chen!"

An old man stepped forward, and was he old. He was a hunched over geezer, probably the age the Third Hokage was when he died fighting Orochimaru. He wore a simple karate uniform, with the kanji for facial hair on the back. He had a Fu Manchu mustache and a straight grey hair, reaching down from under the straw hat he wore on his head. He got a violet ball.

Eventually, all the quarterfinalists got a ball of a different color.

Naruto- Orange

Lee- Green

Muneko- Yellow

Fuji- Indigo

Blind- White

Sado- Blue

Yang-Chen- Violet

Pandaman- Red

"Okay, now that everyone's got their balls," Ken said, "It's time for the MAIN EVENT!"

He clapped his hands, and then the disco began to shake. The wall behind Ken spun around, revealing what may be the biggest

pachinko machine anyone had ever seen. It reached up to the ceiling.

"That is the second-biggest pachinko machine I've ever seen!" Naruto gasped, staring upward.

"I told them we shoulda gone for the human-size model," Ken whispered to a flunky. A bit louder, he announced, "Finalists, present your balls!"

Taking each ball away from the quarterfinalists, Ken loaded them into the pachinko machine. Pulling back on the trigger, Ken let 'em rip, sending the balls all over the pachinko machine. As the machine flashed and rang its bells, the balls bounced all over. After a few minutes, the balls ended up in the eight slots- one for each of them.

"Are they all in?" Ken asked aloud. After receiving a thumbs-up from a flunky, Ken yelled, "Okay, hit the lights!"

The lights in the disco shut off, casting the room into darkness. Then, within that darkness, a new glow emerged. The balls were glowing, and on the pachinko, a tournament line-up appeared above the balls. From slot 1-8, the line-up was displayed as this;

- 1) Pandaman
- 2) Uzumaki Naruto
- 3) Muneko
- 4) Blind the Buddha
- 5) Rock Lee
- 6) Wong Sado
- 7) Fuji
- 8) Yang-Chen

" My god! It's line-up by pachinko!"

"Okay, everyone!" Ken yelled as the lights came back, "The matches have been decided! And now, to announce where the matches will take place."

"Aren't they taking place at the stadium?" Lee asked.

"Nope!" Ken grinned, "It's only the quarterfinals. We'll go back to Budokai Stadium when we hit the semifinals. For now, Block B, consisting of slots 5-8, will be take place at Sonson fields, next Saturday, broadcasted on channels 4, 13, 44."

"So, we're going to be on television," Sado remarked, running his hand through his hair, "Good decision."

"And Block A consisting of slots 1-4, will take place at Saotome Hall, broadcasted on radio station 96.7."

"What?!" Naruto yelled, "My match isn't gonna be on TV!? Why!?" He pointed a finger of accusation at Ken, "You don't think I'm good enough to be on TV, don't you!?"

Ken shrugged. "Yeah, something like that."

Lee and Yang-Chen both had to restrain Naruto from attacking Ken.

"You can't hurt him!" Lee whispered, "He's a celebrity!"

"Besides," Ken remarked, "There are other reasons..."

Kakashi raised an eyebrow. *What does he mean by that?*
Suspicious, Kakashi glanced at Pandaman, Blind, and Muneko.
Does it have to do with one of those three?

"Okay, everyone!" Ken yelled as flunky with camera stepped up.
"Let's get a picture of you guys before the eventually violence tears you unrecognizable."

As the quarterfinalists fought for the best positions in the picture frame, Kakashi noticed that Wan was looking a little red in the face. "Are you okay?"

"I t'ink I went over the recommended limit," Wan slurred, teetering back and forth. "But I'm okay!"

Meanwhile, the quarterfinalists had finally agreed on a decent grouping. As they posed for the camera, Ken said, "Okay, let's start this tournament off with a bang!"

It was at that moment Wan hiccupped. The ball dispenser was sent flying by powers unknown, crashing behind the quarterfinalists, sending them diving for cover, just as the camera flashed.

"Sah'ee," Wan gulped, rubbing his head.

Tournament Round 1 Match-Ups

-Block A-

Pandaman vs Uzumaki Naruto

Muneko vs Blind the Buddha

-Block B-

Rock Lee vs Wong Sado

Fuji vs Yang-Chen

D a t t e b a y o

A/n: The matches have been decided! And so, I'd like to explain a few things. I got the name of the disco from the name Wong Fei Hung, a real-life martial artist who supposedly started the 'calling your attacks' thing. No, I am not lying.

The song is from the animated feature *Animalympics* . Watch it.

A pachinko is a type of Japanese gambling device, similar to a pinball machine combined with a slot machine. I got the idea of using one for the tournament lottery from Kinnikuman 's second Choujin Olympics arc. Of course, they used the human-sized pachinko Ken mentioned. Don't worry, I won't be copying Kinnikuma the entire story. Just for this round. See ya next time, and be sure to...

READ!

REVIEW!

Naruto vs Pandaman

Opening Theme: Bomb A Head (Opening for *Tenjou Tenge*)

Chapter 9: Naruto vs Pandaman

In the Hokage's Office, Tsunade was facing a problem. Across from her were the Ninja within Naruto's Rookie 9, who had decided not to go on any missions today.

"Look," Tsunade growled, "I know you want to cheer Naruto on for his match, but we can't just stop what we're doing just for the Dragon Belt!" she held up a form in the air and gave it a wave. "You have missions!"

"But we'll miss the match!" Choji whined.

"Too bad!" Tsunade snapped, really fed up with the whole argument. This was the sixth time she had to cajole someone into doing their job. It seemed like everyone wanted a day off to watch the quarterfinals. "I want to go and support our warriors in the tournament too, but you don't see me leaving! Now get to work!"

The young ninja left, with some grumbles from Kiba and Choji, and a "what a drag" from Shikamaru.

Rolling her eyes, Tsunade reached under her desk and pulled up a radio. Fiddling with the knobs, she muttered, "What station is the match on, again...?"

D a t t e b a y o

"This is bad," Sakura whispered, "Very bad!"

Ever since the lottery, Sakura had been confused with Ken's comments that there had been 'other reasons' to holding the A-block matches in small arena with little coverage. When Kakashi had

expressed his concerns about the other people in A-block, she decided to do a little digging. In the Hadoken Library, she found some newspaper pages that gave her a new, and terrifying, perspective on Naruto's opponents.

The first one had the headline **SAND KUNOICHI KILLS ESCAPED CONVICT** , with a picture of Muneko, licking a little blood off of her fingers. Behind her was the cut-up body of someone in a prison uniform.

The second page had a picture of Blind the Buddha standing atop of a pile of bodies, all of whom were wearing ninja uniforms. **THE BLOODLESS BUDDHA STRIKES AGAIN** said the headline.

The last page had the headline **DEVIL SUPERMAN ATTACKS HARBOR** and a picture of Pandaman, standing amidst wrecked ships and beaten, battered sailors. He had a particularly mean-looking sailor in a headlock.

No wonder the matches aren't being shown on television! Sakura thought, All three of them...even that sand bimbo...are merciless killers!

D a t t e b a y o

At the hotel Team Kakashi was staying at, Sakura reported this to Kakashi. The Copy Ninja didn't seem too surprised.

"With that much limited coverage, something had to be up." Kakashi said, not looking up from his copy of Make Out Tactics . "Well, there's nothing we can do about it except prepare." Slapping the book shut, he addressed his team. "Sakura, Yamato, you go to Saotome Hall where Naruto's match is and be ready to support him if things get out of hand."

Yamato and Sakura nodded.

"What about you and Sai, Kakashi-sensei?" Sakura asked.

"Well, we are officially the Leaf Village support party," Kakashi explained, adjusting his neck, "So Sai and I will go to watch Lee's match at Sonson Fields."

"The bounty hunter who overpowered both Lee and Shikamaru is there," Sai said, "We'll need to analyze his abilities the best we can."

"That goes for you too," Kakashi nodded at Yamato and Sakura. "See if you can figure out how Blind the Buddha fights from his match with Muneko."

"Hai!"

D a t t e b a y o

On the day of the match, the Uzumaki Family was right outside the main entrance of Saotome Hall. The Hall looked like a normal building. Above the entrance was a marquee that said TODAY: DRAGON BELT PRELIMINARIES BLOCK A FIGHTS. TOMORROW: SHOGI TOURNAMENT.

"Ahhh, Saotome Hall!" Kushina sighed, "It's been so long since I've been here!"

"When was that, Mama?" Naruto asked.

"Oh," Kushina shrugged, "Just for a prize fight, to get some quick cash. I didn't really have a steady job back then, being a nomad and all, so I had to do what I could."

"How much did you get?"

"Just enough to get her clothes back from the hotel!" Wan's voice broke in.

The Uzumakis turned around to see the good doctor standing right behind them, a cup of coffee in his hand.

"Remember, Kushina?" Wan asked, taking a sip, "You couldn't pay your bill, so you had to sneak out of the hotel in a towel." Wan chuckled. "You wore a pair of overalls stolen off a clothesline just to be decent..."

Naruto and Kushina turned red, Naruto more from imagining his mom in nothing but a towel.

"You had to bring that up, didn't you?" Kushina muttered, looking away. "Stupid room service charges..."

"If I recall, it wasn't all fun that day," Wan continued, "You had a bit of a tussle with that Gato squirt, right?"

Naruto blinked, and looked at Kushina. Gato...that name sounded familiar...

"I remember that runt," Kushina said. Looking at Naruto, she began to explain. "See, this little half-pint gangster offered me some money if I took a dive...he bet on my loss. I needed the money, so I accepted his offer."

"And won the match." Wan put in.

"Huh!?" Naruto blanched. "You took a bribe to lose, but won anyway!?"

"Well, I figure," Kushina grinned, "If I'm gonna take bribes, I might as well lie too... That shorty wasn't too happy about it, come to think..."

In the locker room of Saotome Hall, Kushina, dressed in naught but a pair of overalls and white tee shirt, sat down as Wan, dressed in orange jinbei and straw hat, banaged several cuts and bruises.

" Nice job, kid," The psychic doctor laughed, "Now you can get your clothes back from the hotel!"

Kushina winced from some alcohol, and sighed. "You know, you sure know how to take the glow out of win."

It was at that moment that the door to the locker room burst open, and in stepped Gato (Yes, THAT Gato!), his hair brown. Behind him was professional Shinobi(Meaning he was dressed traditionally).

" Oh, hi!" Kushina waved. "How ya doin'?"

" Don't give me that!" Gato snapped, "We had a deal! I lost MONEY because of you! Big money!"

Kushina shrugged. "I figure, if I'm gonna take bribes, I might as well lie too."

Gato twitched. He then pointed at Kushina and yelled, "Get her!"

Then shinobi dashed out from behind him, towards Kushina.

POW!

The shinobi fell back, his eyes spinning. Kushina, her fist out, remarked, "Well, that's rude."

Gato gulped as Kushina reached for him.

" You shouldn't attack people you don't plan to fight yourself, tiny." Kushina said.

"Whoa..." Naruto breathed, "So, what did you do to him?"

"Not much," Kushina replied, shrugging, "I just threw him into the hotel's pool."

"A pool that had been emptied ," Wan pointed out, "Luckily, the little loudmouth survived, actually landing on his feet. Walked funny afterwards, though... No one ever saw him again on the gambling circuit. I think he went back to his shipping business."

Something inside of Naruto's mind turned on a lightbulb. A gangster, named Gato, with a shipping business, who had a funny walk...

"Gato!?" he cried, "You mean, THAT Gato!?"

"How many Gatos are there?" Kushina asked, raising an eyebrow.

Naruto quickly ran his mother and Wan through a hurried description of the events that occurred in his first mission to the Land of Waves. When he was done, Wan tapped his own nose in thought.

"Hmmm, so that's what happened to Gato..." The psychic doctor murmured, "I heard he was eaten by a fox monster, but that was probably the rumor mill in work."

"Fox monster?" Naruto repeated, an uneasy feeling in his stomach... with fangs. He wondered if anyone aside from Haku saw him unleash the Ninetails' chakra during their fight. He had a feeling Kakashi knew what had happened...

"C'mon," Kushina said, shaking Naruto's shoulder and out of his thoughts, "We need to get inside. Your match is only an hour away."

"I'll see at the official weigh-in. See you there." Wan said, and vanished from sight.

Naruto stared at the space where the doctor used to be.

"How'd he do that?" Naruto asked, pointing.

"That's his psychic power at work," Kushina grinned, "C'mon, let's go."

D a t t e b a y o

Saotome Hall was primarily used for boxing, and other prize fights. It wasn't a place for someone looking for glory or fame, nor was the building very extravagant, big enough for only one room as well as some smaller areas for fighters to change clothes. In the very center of the building was the arena, where the matches took place, connected to the doors by four entry ways. The seating amount was relatively small, capable of fitting only fifty or so people.

It was for this reason that Sakura and Yamato felt a bit cramped when the Hall found itself hosting a full house.

"Man...look at all these people..." Sakura murmured, turning her head left and right. As there was no snack stand, vendors were marching up, down, and across the seating aisles, bellowing for customers to buy popcorn, drinks, and souvenirs.

"It's only like this because of that boy," An old man's voice next to her said, "Naruto has caused quite a stir."

Sakura looked to her left and saw Ebizo, one of the elders from Hidden Sand Village sitting next to her! The old man took a swig from a sake' glass.

"Grampa Ebizo!?" She cried, leaning back suddenly, crashing into Yamato. "What are you doing here!?"

"Same as you," the old timer replied, "I'm here to support my Hidden Village's representative, the Bloody Claw, Muneko."

"I see," Yamato said, pushing Sakura off. "But what did you mean before about Naruto?"

Ebizo took another drink of sake' before answering. "Ever since Chiyo died, I've been doing some research. For the past three years, there have been numerous isolated incidents in numerous countries, each one apparently separate. However, in each report I've read, these four words keep appearing," Ebizo held up four fingers. "Whiskers, blue-eyes, blond, spirals... Doesn't that sound familiar?"

Yamato crossed his arms, eyes closed in thought. "That timeframe would correspond with the time since Naruto first became a Genin."

Ebizo nodded. "I thought so. Shinobi, by tradition, should close their hearts, walk over the bodies of the dead to continue the mission, and never trust an enemy. But now there's this boy... No, a young man, who isn't just ignoring those traditions, but stepping and spitting on

them! And in doing so, he's showing us old geezers for the fools we are."

The lights went off, save for the ones over the ring.

"And now, the world will see who this mysterious rebel is, with their own eyes," Ebizo finished, looking to the ring. "If only my siblings were alive to see this."

Sakura looked at Ebizo suddenly. Did he say *siblings*? Wasn't it just Chiyo?

Sakura was pulled from this train of thought by music as one of the entry ways was lit up.

Background Music: ROCKS (By Hound Dog)

" Now entering from the east wing... From the Land of Whirlpools... The 'Hero'... UZUMAKI NARUTO!!!"

Naruto strode out from the doors into the main Hall, a big smile on his face. As he walked down to the ring, the crowd cheered. Naruto waved to the crowd, making silly gestures that actually seemed cool in that context. Behind him were Kushina and Tayuya, the older laughing at her son's antics, the younger looking quite annoyed. Once he was three meters from the ring, Naruto stopped, slumping. As Kushina and Tayuya rushed up (Well, Kushina rushed) to see what was wrong, Naruto's body began to vibrate. Without warning, Naruto made a chakra-enhanced jump, flying through the air, and landed in the center of the ring, striking many macho poses. The crowd ate it up.

Sakura couldn't help but laugh, applauding Naruto's stunt against her better judgement.

As Naruto's theme song ended, the lights for another entryway lit up.

Background Music: Pandaman

" Now entering from the west wing... From parts unknown... The 'Beast'... PANDAMAN!!"

Pandaman walked in, looking surprisingly timid, almost frightful... People cheered as he marched to the ring, but they weren't as loud as the cheers Naruto got.

"Strange..." Ebizo muttered, "He looked much more muscular during the preliminaries..."

Sakura silently concurred. The Pandaman she read about in the library was nothing like this guy... This Pandaman looked like he was going to bolt at the sight of danger. Maybe she was wrong...

After Pandaman entered the ring, the music ended and the lights went back on. He and Naruto met in the center, where the referee, a portly, bald man with a toothbrush mustache, was.

"Gentlemen, you know the rules," The Ref began, addressing the two, "There are no rules. This is to be a fight to the finish! Now, let me explain a few guidelines. Number one! If you are knocked down for ten seconds, you will be eliminated. Number two! If you remain outside the ring for twenty seconds, you will be eliminated. Steel weapons and help from other living creatures are strictly forbidden, and if you die, we'll provide you with a nice funeral."

Didn't he say there weren't any rules? Naruto thought.

"Right, now, shake hands, and come out fighting!" the Ref finished, bidding a hasty retreat to the ropes.

Naruto gave his rather scrawny opponent a once-over, and couldn't help but make a jab.

"You look pretty skinny," He teased, "What, not eating enough bamboo?"

"Curb your insults until you've seen my abilities," PAndaman said in a surprisingly masculine voice, "Seimei Kikan!"

As if made of rubber, Pandaman's body suddenly inflated, going from skin-and bones to an abundance of muscles, his beanpole frame becoming Herculean!

" Melancholy of Suzumiya Haruhi! Pandaman seems to have some kind of body-changing power!"

Naruto gawked at this revelation. "Nice trick." He said in a small voice.

"Thank you." Pandaman replied, and gave the awestruck ninja an uppercut, sending Naruto into the air.

Meanwhile, the Ref was busy greeting some friends in the audience.

"Hello, Ataru!" The Ref waved, "How's the missus!?"

Turning back to the fight, he found just Pandaman, looking skyward.

"Come, gents!" The Ref said, walking forwards. He snapped his fingers a few times. "Let's give the folks a fight!"

It was then that Naruto came back down, planting himself firmly onto the Ref's shoulders. From his new elevated position, he had a clear shot at Pandaman, and gave the Devil Superman a good punch in the jaw. Pandaman stumbled- and returned with a punch of his own. However, Naruto had already jumped away from the Ref, leaving the poor man to take Pandaman's fist unaided.

" Dear god! Their getting our lovable referee, Mr. Yowamushi, involved in the fight! How violent!"

As Mr. Yowamushi staggered over to the ropes, Naruto landed behind Pandaman. The young ninja launched a flying kick at Pandaman's head, only to miss as Pandaman ducked. Catching Naruto in the air, Pandaman placed his left arm under Naruto's right

leg, and his right arm under Naruto's left leg. Slamming Naruto to the mat, they then began to roll around the ring.

" Pandaman now has Naruto in a Rolling Cradle!"

"Looks like that's it for Naruto," Tayuya shrugged- and got a punch from Kushina.

"What are you talking about!?" Kushina yelled, "This fight's just started!"

"What I'm talking about," Tayuya hissed, rubbing her sore cheek, "Is that the Panda-freak's got your idiot son in a pin, and now's he being thrown against the ring with those damn panda-muscles being smashed against him! Ninjas are bred for speed, not power! That idiots body can't handle those kind of hits!"

Kushina looked back to the match. "You think I don't know that? I've known what ninja's weakness is."

Meanwhile, Pandaman felt Naruto go limp and ceased his rolling. Releasing Naruto from the hold, he got up, leaving Naruto face-down on the canvas. Mr. Yowamushi began to count.

"That's why, for the month we've trained," Kushina continued, "I've trained my son to *take* damage!"

Just as Mr. Yowamushi reached 'six' Naruto got up.

"Awww man," Naruto groaned theatrically, "That kinda hurt!"

" Incredible! After that harrowing cradle ride, Naruto is unaffected!"

"And now it's my turn!" Naruto yelled, and began to rain a flurry of punches and kicks onto Pandaman. The Panda-themed superman was soon being forced back towards the ropes.

" Uzumaki Naruto has now begun his counterattack! Look at those fists!"

"Go, Naruto!" Sakura cheered.

"Let him have it, sweetie!" Kushina whooped, "Send that bear guy flying!"

Naruto kept up the assault, and only stopped when Pandaman slumped back against the ropes.

"Had enough?" He asked determinedly.

"Actually," Pandaman said, reaching out, "I've just begun to fight!"

PAndaman grabbed Naruto by the head, and flung the young ninja at the opposing ropes. With the ropes acting as a make-shift slingshot, Naruto was sent flying back at Pandaman, who knocked Naruto back with a mighty punch, sending him back at the ropes. This happened once more, and on the third time, Pandaman caught Naruto in a suplex.

" Ooh! A stunning Ropes-Punch combo, with a suplex follow-up! Naruto must be finished no-OWIE!"

CRASH!

"Naruto's not finished!" Kushina yelled, having thrown a table at the commentator's booth.

"We'll see about that." Pandaman grunted.

Pandaman picked up Naruto, and placed him on his shoulders, lying face up. Putting his left arm over Naruto's neck, and his right arm over Naruto's legs, Pandaman began to pull down.

"Arrgh!" Naruto cried in pain.

" Omamori Himari! If Naruto is bent that way any more, he'll be snapped in two! What a graphic end to someone who made such outrageous passes during the preliminaries!"

No way... I ain't dying like this! Naruto thought, and made some handsigns. *"Kage Bushin No Jutsu!"*

Two clones of Naruto appeared, standing in front and behind Pandaman. Pandaman stopped pulling to look in amazement at the newcomers.

"What the... Hey, ref!" Pandaman called out, "I thought having additional help was illegal!"

"They're probably just illusions." Mr. Yowamushi replied, waving it off.

The clones quickly proved that they were *not* illusions, when the one behind kicked Pandaman's legs while the one in front delivered a stunning uppercut to Pandaman's chin. The Devil Superman let go of the real Naruto, stumbling back a few steps. But Naruto wasn't done yet. Just as Pandaman was regaining his footing, Naruto and his clones each delivered a solid kick to the head in succession, following up with a Rasengan.

"Nice fight." Commented Mr. Yowamushi.

Pandaman stumbled back, hitting his head against one of the corner posts.

"How do you like that, Panda-face!" Naruto taunted, panting. His clones vanished in a poof of smoke.

Pandaman, a little dizzy, and now a little TO'd, got back up. Playtime was OVER. Grabbing Naruto by the head, Pandaman flung Naruto high into the air. As Naruto began to fall, Pandaman leapt up after him, spinning in the air.

"Giant Panda Deathlock!" Pandaman yelled, and caught Naruto in the same hold from before.

"Argh!" Naruto cried, feeling his bones shake as Pandaman's shoulders crashed into his back.

As the two plummeted back to the ring, Pandaman began to spin again.

"G! P! D!" Pandaman yelled as he landed. This abrupt halt in movement had the double-effect of jarring Naruto's bones both vertically and horizontally. Pandaman then casually tossed Naruto aside.

" Lucifer and the Biscuit Hammer! Pandaman just slammed Naruto with the fearsome Giant Panda Deathlock!"

"He won't be getting back up." Pandaman commented confidentially as Mr. Yowamushi began the count. But, just as Mr. Yowamushi reached 'Five' Naruto... stood back up!

"You'll have to do better than that," Naruto gritted, "I've felt worse."

The crowd, naturally, went wild.

"You've felt worse... Are you kidding me?" Pandaman growled, "You look like it's taking you everything you've got to stand!"

"Ha!" Naruto laughed, though he had a feeling it was true. But he also knew that his Rasengan did some damage to Pandaman as well.

I've got to give him one last hit... Naruto thought, his mind racing.

"You wouldn't talk so big if I put you in a second GPD!" Pandaman yelled, stepping towards him.

Maybe it was the pain, maybe it was the adrenaline kicking in, or maybe it was the smell of canvas, but Naruto then had a brilliant idea.

"I bet I could take three more of those!" He bragged.

"Oh, yeah!?" Pandaman snarled, and threw Naruto into the air again.

"There he goes again." Ebizo noted.

"Is he crazy?!" Tayuya yelled, "Why would that (Bleep!) want to go through that again!?"

"He- He must have a plan..." Kushina stammered, looking unsure.

In the air, Naruto was quickly forming handsigns as Pandaman rose up to him.

" *Kagebushin No Jutsu!* "

The clone that appeared quickly pulled Naruto just out of Pandaman's reach out at the last minute. The two Narutos then delivered a mighty kick.

"U!"

The pair then swung under Pandaman's body, the real Naruto grabbing his head while the clone grabbed his legs. The two then pressed their feet against Pandaman's back and pushed.

"Zu!"

The clones quickly let go and swung around to punch Pandaman in both sides of his head.

"Ma!"

Taking advantage of Pandaman's daze, the two Narutos moved to place his head between theirs, resting on their shoulders. They gripped his legs, forcing him into a bizarre upside-down bent-over position.

"Ki!"

The three hit the mat, landing so hard it actually bent under the pressure.

"Narutimate Buster!"

Pandaman was thrown aside as the clone 'poofed' from existence. Mr. Yowamushi walked over to the fallen superman and began to count.

" What... What an outstanding reversal and comeback! Naruto has turned Pandaman's Deathlock against him!"

"Nine...ten." Mr. Yowamushi held up Naruto's arm. "The winner!"

The crowd roared its approval.

"I knew he'd win!" Kushina cheered.

"Like hell you did." Tayuya replied, smiling nonetheless.

"Oh, Naruto!" Sakura squealed, and practically flew from her seat to the ring. Yamato got up to follow her.

" The... The winner of Dragon Belt Championships Quarterfinals match 1, Uzumaki Naruto, from the Land of Whirlpools!"

Naruto looked around, dazed and amazed at his success. As soon as Mr. Yowamushi let go of his arm, he fell back- into the arms of Tai Wan.

"Nice job, kid." Wan chuckled.

"Doc..." Naruto said, "Howd you get here?"

"That's my secret," the psychic doctor grinned, "Maybe someday I'll tell you."

As Naruto's friends and family swarmed around, Naruto noticed Pandaman finally getting up.

"Ha! How'd you like that, Panda-jerk!" Naruto gloated.

"Go ahead...laugh at me... Everyone does..." Pandaman gritted, "After all... I SAW PRINCESS KAGUYA!"

There was a shocked silence at this random proclamation.

Where the hell did that come from? Tayuya thought.

Then the entire Hall burst into laughter.

"Look at this guy! He still believes in fairy tales!"

"What a loser!"

"Hey, maybe he saw the rabbits on the moon, too!"

Even Naruto's cheering squad were chuckling. Naruto, however, wasn't.

"Really?" He asked, a peculiar expression on his face. "You mean, the princess of the moon?"

Pandaman stared at Naruto before answering. "...Yeah."

"Cool!"

"EH!?" Everyone cried.

"You... You believe me?" Pandaman whispered, looking at Naruto.

"Sure!" Naruto put his hands behind his head, beaming. "So much crazy stuff has happened to me, I can't say something isn't true. If you say you've seen the Princess Kaguya, I believe it!"

"You...believe me..." Pandaman repeated. He put a hand over his mask, a sobbing sound coming out. "No one's ever believed me when I told them... They made fun of me and beat me up..."

"I'm not gonna beat you up." Naruto grinned.

Pandaman put his hand over his chest. "This... this feeling... I've never felt it before... is it... *friendship?!'*"

Pandaman got up, put on a cloak and a samurai straw hat and walked towards the doors.

"The warmth of friendship... though it burns brighter than the sun, it is as refreshing as a spring breeze... I thank you, Uzumaki Naruto, for being my friend."

Naruto fell to his knees and reached out.

"Pandamaaaaan!" He wailed. It was a very touching scene.

Or, it would have been, if Naruto and Pandaman hadn't both collapsed, the latter before he was even halfway to the doors.

"Will someone please carry those idiots to the infirmary!?" Wan yelled, fed up.

D a t t e b a y o

A/N: Annnnd another chapter done! I'm sorry it took so long, I was busy with other projects. Anyway, in case you were wondering, Pandaman's little speech at the end is a reference to his official bio provided by Oda in One Piece volume 7. Basically, because no one would believe he saw Kaguya-Hime, a figure in the Japanese tale, Taketori Monoatari, he became a supervillain. I thought it would be funny if he and Naruto became if Naruto believed him. Also, the move he used on Naruto near the end of the fight is an actual move that Pandaman uses in the video game, One Piece: Grand Battle 2. He also has some other special moves, but I don't know how they go, otherwise I would have included them.

Seimei Kikan: *Life Return* , a technique where you control your body to the point of changing the muscle mass, digestive process, and even hair! I thought Pandaman would know this, since he looks

so skinny in One Piece, looking different from his 'pro-wrestler' official form.

Oh, and in case you didn't notice, Mr. Yowamushi, is a reference to Wimpy, from Popeye . In the first story arc Wimpy appeared in, he acted as an inattentive referee in one of Popeye's boxing matches.

Also, Kushina's story about Gato I tossed in for no reason at all... I just liked the idea of Gato, that insufferable jerk of a weasel CEO, having an earlier encounter with Naruto's mom before bumping into Naruto... the story structure I got from the Hulk Hogan movie *Mr. Nanny* .

Read and REVIEW!

Blind vs Muneko

Opening Theme: Bomb A Head (First opening of *Tenjou Tenge*)

Chapter 10: Blind Vs Muneko

In a special room away from the ring, Naruto and Pandaman were being treated for their injuries. Tai Wan was doing most of the work, with Sakura helping if asked. For some reason, the medic ninja was content to watch how the Psychic Doctor worked. Off to the side, Kushina, Tayuya, and Yamato looked on. Wan was over by the bed Naruto was in.

"Okay," Wan ordered, putting his hand on Naruto's chest, "Now, bite down on that piece of plastic I gave you, this *will* hurt."

"Ooh-gay," Naruto said through the puck-shaped object, "Buh wh..."

Naruto suddenly felt a mighty *force* inside his body, and every one of his nerve cells screamed out in agony. Naruto bit down on the puck so hard it almost broke.

"Okay, that should do it," Wan said, removing his hand. "Just rest now."

"What did you do?!" cried Sakura, rushing to Naruto's side.

"I just popped some of his bones back into their proper joints," Wan explained. He pulled a teapot out from his coat and poured himself a cup. "If left alone, they would have caused him some serious problems later on."

Cringing, Naruto spat out the puck to look up at Wan and asked, "Why didn't you give me some anesthetic?"

"My policy is ninja don't get anesthetic." Wan replied shortly.

"What I want to know is how he did that." Yamato murmured.

"It's telekinesis," Kushina explained, "He can move stuff with his mind."

"Kushina!" Wan admonished, "Don't go telling assassins how I can do stuff! They might learn how to kill me!"

Kushina stuck her tongue at Wan.

"Well, can you tell me?" Sakura asked, "It wouldn't be wrong to trade secrets with a fellow medic, would it?"

"I wouldn't be so sure about that," Wan muttered, and said loudly, "But, since it won't do you any good, I suppose I will. See, what I do is flow my psychic power through a person's body, and I can tell immediately tell what's wrong- I can even sense things a normal X-ray would miss."

Sakura gasped. "And since your power is already in the patient's body, you can perform certain surgeries without having to open them up!"

"You catch on quick," Wan admitted, "Now if we can only do something about that violent streak, you'll have surpassed Tsunade..."

Before Sakura could demand to know what Wan meant about a violent streak, a strange, ringing filled the air.

"Someone's cookies are done." Kushina noted.

"No, that's the telephone," Wan sighed, and answered the appliance. "Hello?...Yeah, he's here." Wan handed the phone to Naruto. "It's for you."

Naruto took the phone. "Hello?"

" *Naruto?*"

Naruto blinked. "Lee?"

" *Excellent match! I heard about it on the radio!*"

"Thanks!" Naruto grinned. "How'd your match go? You won, right?"

" *Well, no...*"

"You lost!?" Naruto cried, then clutched his chest and groaned.

" *No... It is not like that... It is just... they have not held my match yet. We are still waiting for the soccer game to end.*"

"Soccer game?"

D a t t e b a y o

Sonson Fields. One of the most popular sport fields in the Land of Dragons, it had the honor of not just hosting two matches for the Dragon Belt, but the semifinal game in the Dragon Soccer League. While it was planned for the game to end at two, by some bizarre trick of sporting fate, the two times had tied by the final buzzer, and were now going into overtime.

Sitting on a bench of to the side, the B Block quarterfinalists, Kakashi, Sai, and some chick clinging onto Wong Sado watched the game.

"Go, Kashima." Sai cheered in monotone.

D a t t e b a y o

"Oh..." Naruto said slowly, "Well, good luck when it starts. Bye."

Naruto hung up. He stared into space until a roar of excitement grabbed his attention.

"What's that?" He asked, looking around.

"The next match," Yamato announced, checking his watch. "It's starting."

"It is? Crap! I gotta go!" Naruto was halfway from leaping out of bed when Wan's telekinesis forced him back down.

" *You* gotta sit still and rest." Wan ordered sternly.

"But I wanna watch the match!" Naruto whined.

He just wants to look at Muneko's jugs some more! Sakura thought angrily.

"Isn't there something we can do?" Yamato asked Wan, "He'll need to see who he fights in the semifinals."

Kushina snapped her fingers. "Hey, I've got an idea!"

D a t t e b a y o

Five Minutes later, the gang was at ringside, including Naruto in his bed.

"Are you sure this is alright?" Sakura asked, looking around.

"Well, for us, sure," Kushina replied, "You and Yamato, however, better get back to your seats."

Before Sakura could respond to that, the lights went off, save for the ones around an entry way.

Background Music: Mouse Chu Mouse (By Under17)

" *Now entering from the south wing... From the Land of Wind...
'Sexy Girl'...MUNEKO!!*"

Muneko, dressed in her visually appealing battle-outfit seen at the beginning of the preliminaries, strolled in. Practically every male in the audience went wild as she put every bounce and swivel in her

steps. Upon reaching the ring, she turned around and leaned back against the ropes. Seeing Naruto, she winked and smacked her lips. Satisfied with the way Naruto blushed, Muneko back-flipped into the ring, landing in the center. The male side of the audience ate it up.

Sakura frowned, remembering the picture and article she had seen.

Meanwhile, the lights on another entryway lit up.

Background Music: Velonica (By Aqua Timez)

" Now entering from the north wing... From parts unknown... 'The Samurai'... Blind the Buddha!!"

Blind walked in slowly, tapping the floor with his cane, like blind man would. He did not get as many cheers as Muneko did, as most of the audience were trying to make sense of this masked oddball. After a slow and steady march, Blind bumped into the ring, causing some members of the audience to snicker.

Sakura frowned. Was this stumbling fool really the person who paralyzed her at the Land of Waves?

With some difficulty, Blind climbed into the ring, walking up to Muneko in the center.

Mr. Yowamushi, now sporting an eyepatch over where he got hit during the Naruto-Pandaman match, approached both of them.

"Gentlemen," He began, and then paused. Taking another look at Muneko, he said, "People, you know the rules. There are no rules. This is to be a fight to the finish!"

As Mr. Yowamushi continued, Muneko gave her opponent a once-over. She wasn't sure what to think about this character... He had remained completely covered during the prelims, something she just couldn't get. And for all she knew, that stumbling earlier was just an act to lure her guard.

I think I better end this quickly Muneko decided, *After all, it's not like we're on television now...why show off?*

"Right, now shake hands, and come out fighting!" Mr. Yowamushi finished, and hurried away.

Muneko quickly moved on the offensive, delivering a punch Blind blocked. Not to be discouraged, Muneko followed up with a kick, but Blind blocked that as well.

" It looks like Blind and Muneko are equally matched! What a stalemate!"

Up in the audience, Ebizo watched the match with growing trepidation. Blind was reacting too well to Muneko's assault. Even if Blind had trained his ears to listen to the subtle sounds a person's body make when it moves, there was something off about the Buddha's movements.

It's almost as if he can see what Muneko is doing... He thought worriedly.

Back in the ring, Muneko was beginning to get annoyed with the stalemate. So far, all Blind had done was block, and the lack of action beyond that was getting to her.

This is getting nowhere... I'd better use the Blade of Wind, Muneko thought, and began to gather wind-chakra to her fingertips. It should be noted that her fingernails had been sharpened to resemble claws. *Even if this joker blocks, the blade'll cut clear through! It'll be a bit messy...* She stuck her tongue out. *...But it is a fight to the finish.*

Swinging her wind-powered hand, Muneko chopped at Blind...who not only dodged, but swung around her body, too! Meanwhile, the ropes in front of Muneko, as well as Mr. Yowamushi's belt, snapped in two. This caused Mr. Yowamushi's pants to drop, revealing whistle dotted boxers.

Muneko didn't care about the boxers. Whirling around, she saw Blind standing before her, his arms outstretched, fingers and thumbs put together, forming a triangle, equal to her stomach.

"Die." Blind said.

What the audience saw next was Muneko jolting horribly from some unknown force, before collapsing on the mat. Mr. Yowamushi stared at her fallen form, forgetting to hold up his pants.

"Don't bother."

Mr. Yowamushi looked at Blind, who had spoken just then.

"She won't be getting back up." Blind said calmly.

Wan was instantly in the ring. Touching Muneko, he concentrated. His eyes closed, then popped wide open.

"Oh my god!" He cried, and he and Muneko vanished from the ring.

" *Uh... The winner, um, is Blind the Buddha... What just happened?*"

D a t t e b a y o

Later on, the Uzumakis, Tayuya, Sakura, Yamato, and Ebizo, were gathered outside the medical room Wan had holed himself up in.

Coming out, Wan wiped some sweat from his brow. "I've stabilized her condition, but it'll be a while before she can eat anything spicy. I'll have a full list of what not to eat by tonight."

"Doctor, tell me," Kushina asked, "What happened?"

"I'm not entirely sure," Wan admitted, scratching the back of his head. "It seemed like someone took an air cannon to her stomach. The damage is too deep for a normal bludgeoning tool to create. But even so..."

"What?" Sakura pressed.

"There are some spots that seem hurt, even though they weren't in range of Blind's attack, whatever it was," Wan said, "Almost as if they appeared in reaction... Did Muneko have any stomach surgery recently?" He looked to Ebizo for answers.

Ebizo thought for a moment before answering. "The most recent I can recall is a disorder she contracted about a year ago."

"So... What are you saying?" Naruto asked, "That Blind's attack brought that disorder back?"

"I'm not sure...maybe," Wan muttered, "If someone is seriously injured, the body might contain some physical memory, a subtle scar, especially if they weren't treated right. But I've never seen a scar that old get attacked so hard it would harm the rest of the body!"

Everyone stared at Wan. Naruto felt a cold sweat run down his forehead.

I'm in trouble... He thought.

D a t t e b a y o

A/n: Another one done! This wasn't too hard to write, as I already had the fight between Muneko and Blind planned out. As for their entrance songs, Muneko's is the opening theme song for the anime *Mouse*, while Blind's is the most recent opening for the *Bleach* anime. I got the idea for the entrances from certain videos on youtube, where a Kaixa913deno has created Smackdown vs Raw 2009 entrances with OCs that resemble Kinnikuman chars. Oh, and Sai's 'cheer' is a reference to an actual Japanese soccer team.

Next chapter, I'm gonna do Lee's match, so get ready!

Rock Lee vs Wong Sado

Opening theme: Bomb a Head (Opening for *Tenjou Tenge*)

Chapter 11: Rock Lee Vs Wong Sado

Chan Ken stood in front of a mounted television camera, with the soccer game playing behind him.

"What's up, y'all?" Ken grinned, "I'm Chan Ken, bringing you a Dragon Belt update! Previously, we stuck our quarterfinalists with rather bloody reps in the closed off ring of Saotome Hall, hoping to keep the audience's freak-out factor as low as we can go. We'll have the full videos for sale at our gift shops next Sunday. But, in summary, Naruto beat Pandaman with a shocking slam reversal after taking the P-ster's nastiest moves

"Meanwhile, in what may be the shortest fight of the tournament, our hottest contender Mune-ko suffered a shocking and sudden defeat at the hands of the mysterious Blind the Buddha. Don't worry, our tournament doctor assures us she'll live."

" Gooooaaaaaallll!!!"

As the crowd began to cheer, Ken looked behind him and smirked.

"Now," He said, "Let's watch as our B block quarterfinalists finally get things started! In just a few minutes, Rock Lee and Wong Sado will kick off the ball with could be the hottest brawl yet, on the Dragon Belt Championship!"

D a t t e b a y o

After the broadcast entered a commercial, Ken turned to where some teamsters were setting up a ring in the soccer field. While considerably wider than the ring in Saotome Hall, it differed in that it

consisted of wooden pegs hammered into the grass, with ropes tied around.

"Okay, set up the cameras here, here, and here!"

Ken looked over to see a bunch of odd people setting up audio/video equipment around the ring. They consisted of a bunch of workmen in tee-shirts, shorts, and baseball caps worn backwards, while directed by an older man with a fuzzy white beard and mustache, wearing a red jacket with the words 'Kaizoku-O Productions' stitched on the back, a pair of sunglasses, and a baseball cap worn forwards.

Mr. Juuyaku

Wong Sado's Agent/film director

"Hey!" Ken yelled, walking over to them, "What's going on here?"

"Oh, don't mind us," Mr. Juuyaku said, waving a little paper fan dismissively. "We're just getting ready to record Sado's latest exploits for future reference."

"Uh huh." Ken replied, raising an eyebrow.

"See," Juuyaku explained, "Sado's a really big star, been on TV shows, in movies, and stuff. Since it takes time and money to create a cool action sequence, we thought it would be cheaper to keep the cameras on him when he's doing jobs for Hidden Villages."

Ken cocked his head. "So...what? You just follow him around when he's on missions? Even when he's fighting?"

"No one's complained yet!" Juuyaku winked.

Ken shrugged, deciding it wasn't worth worrying over. However, he still had one gripe. "That's sweet of you, dude, but I'm gonna have to put the brakes on you guys here. All film rights to this fight and others in the Dragon Belt are owned by the Dragon Council." He said, "You fellas gotta clear out."

Mr. Juuyaku threw his hands out in dismay, hitting someone with his fan as it flew from his fingers. "Would you really keep starving artists from their craft?"

Ken frowned. "Can, will."

Mr. Juuyaku's eyes darted for a second, and he pulled a wad of bills from his jacket pocket. He held the wad out to Ken suggestively.

Ken's face brightened, and he took the payola. "Maybe we can work something out..."

Soon after, the ring was set up and the cameras positioned. Not long after those particular chores were done, spot lights at the entrance for the home team lit up.

Background Music: Kasabuta (by Hidenori Chiwata)

" Now entering from the south-west entrance... From the Land of Fire... 'The Soldier'... Rock Lee!!!"

D a t t e b a y o

"Goooo, Lee!" Might Guy cheered, waving his arms around. "Lee! Lee! Lee!"

Hyuuga Hiashi stared at the spandex-clad man from his chair. Somehow, the jonin had gotten into his house, situated himself in front of his big screen, and was now making a racket.

Why do I even lock the door? Hiashi wondered.

D a t t e b a y o

Back at Sonson Fields...

Rock Lee, in his spandex body suit, chunin vest, marched onto the field, escorted by Kakashi and Sai. A firm smile was on his face, and his eyes burned with the fiery passion of youth. The three Leaf Ninja

kept walking until they were halfway to the ring. Stopping, Lee began to cartwheel the rest of the way, eventually landing in the ring. The crowd roared its approval.

Behind him, Kakashi shook his head, an amused smile barely visible under his mask.

The spot lights for the home entrance turned off, just as the lights for the visiting team's entrance turned on.

Background Music: FIRE!! (By Wado Kouji)

" Now entering from the north-east entrance... From the Land of Grass... 'The Superstar'... Wong Sado!!"

Sado, wearing a pair of black pants and a green vest, walked to the ring, a smug expression on his face. Behind him was that girl who was clinging to him earlier. As they walked the air practically shook from the force of all the girls squealing.

"EEEEK!"

"There he is!"

"He's so cute!"

A mob of fangirls quickly stampeded onto the field, bearing down on Sado.

In a flash, that girl, a shapely lass with long light-brown hair reaching down to her back, and big wide eyes, was in front of the pack, her teeth becoming fangs.

"HE'S MINE!! STAY BACK!!!" The girl screamed, and began to unleash clingy fury onto the pack of fangirls.

Yandere Yoko, President/Number 1 Member of the Wong Sado Fan Club and Wong Sado Stalker's Association

Sado gave Yoko an uneasy look as he continued to the ring. Upon climbing in, he gave the audience a thumbs-up, flashing an award-winning smile.

"SQUEEEEE!!" The surviving girls in the crowd went.

Then, giving Lee a smug look, Sado threw off his vest, exposing a yummy six-pack for all to see. The girls in the audience squee'd even more, and Yoko actually developed a nosebleed.

Seeing this, Lee couldn't help but feel a little jealous. He could do that too! Trying to emulate Sado, Lee threw off his chunin vest and flexed his muscles.

No one reacted.

"Don't let it get you down," Kakashi said, trying to comfort a despondent Lee, "Ninja aren't normally supposed to show their faces anyway, so it doesn't matter how handsome you are."

Lee was not comforted by that.

The two fighters met in the ring, where Ken ran them through the rules.

"Okay, dudes, let's make this fight clean, got it?" Ken asked, "No attacking if someone gets knocked out of the ring, no jabs if a count is on, nothin' I gotta call you on. Okay, let's do it!"

As Ken went to leave the ring, Sado gave Lee an apologetic look.

"You know, I feel pretty bad about this," Sado said in what could be a pitying tone, "You came all this way, and now you've gotta leave. Oh, well!"

"Do not count me out just yet!" Lee countered boldly, "I have trained hard for this moment! I can only go forward from here!"

"Yeah, that's what all the cannon fodder says," Sado chuckled, "But, I think I'm gonna have the tougher time."

Lee blinked. "What do you mean?"

"I mean, it's morally conflicting for me to fight you," Sado explained, "You remind me of myself; born from a nowhere family, struggling just to get where you are...movie-star good looks..."

Is he even looking at Lee? Sai thought.

"Pity you're being backed by the wrong force," Sado continued, shaking your head, "If you had any good business sense, you'd drop the Leaf and sign up with a group that can put some money in your pocket."

Lee frowned. "Is that why you left the Leaf as soon as you joined us? For money?"

"It was a publicity stunt," Sado answered, "To see how I rate with different focus groups. I gotta work hard to keep my appeal going."

"In that case, I pity you," Lee sighed, "To live a life like that...no amount of money could make me do the same."

Sado chuckled. "Being pitied by a loser... That's funny."

Sado suddenly launched himself at Lee in a roundhouse kick, which Lee met with one of his own.

"Konoha Senpuu!"

"Arata Senkai!"

Just as the kicks met, Lee flipped over Sado and delivered a punch that Sado spun around to catch. Closing his hand over Lee's fist, Sado pulled Lee in and punched him in the chest.

"Ko Nishi!"

Lee staggered, but Sado wasn't done yet. Letting go of Lee's fist, Sado speared his hands at Lee's throat. Lee ducked, and delivered a powerful kick to Sado's jaw.

"Konoha Shofu!"

Sado went flying towards one corner of the ring, while Lee landed in the opposing corner. Glaring at each other, the two leapt at each other in the air, kicking. They met in the air, the sun behind them...

"Dynamic Entry!"

"Kagaku Itsuwari!"

The two landed on opposite sides of the ring.

"Incredible! Fantastic! Such a rush of movement! I could barely keep up with it!"

"I see you deserve your fame." Lee panted, keeping an unblinking eye on Sado.

"If you ask me, you're not famous enough," Sado countered, panting, "You sure you're just chunin?"

Lee grinned, and Sado grinned back. The two launched at each other, ready to brawl once more. But just as they reached each other...

"Hold it! Time out! Cuuuut!"

Lee and Sado tripped over their feet at the sound of Mr. Juuyaku's voice. Getting up, they saw the director hurrying up to them.

"What's up, director?" Sado asked, getting to his feet. "That last scene not cool enough? Want us to redo it?"

"No, no!" Mr. Juuyaku waved his little fan dismissively. "That was very cool, Sado, darling, the height of hip."

"....I think."

"You think?" Lee cocked his head, "What do you mean, 'You think?'"

"Well... This is embarrassing, actually..." Mr. Juuyaku began to fidget left and right. "But when you guys leapt up into the air like that, we sorta...lost you."

"Lost us?" Lee and Sado exchanged looks.

"Yeah..." Mr. Juuyaku scratched the back of his head awkwardly. "Listen, baby, if it's not too much trouble... could you show us what happened? I mean, it'd be a blemish on our camera crew's record if they couldn't capture what must be a crucial moment in your epic battle."

Lee and Sado thought about it. Sado turned to Lee and asked, "Well, what do ya think? Should we?"

"I think so," Lee decided, clenching his fist, "If only for our audience, who paid good money to watch us fight. We must do it!"

"Hey, Ken," Sado called out to Ken, "You mind if we take a time out to do it?"

"Are you crazy?" Ken asked, "A time out to recreate a single moment in a match? That's the most mindlessly stupid thing I've ever heard of in my life! Go for it!"

Lee gave Ken the Nice Guy pose. Ken turned to Kakashi and Sai.

"Hey!" He called to them, "You idiots help out."

"We're idiots?" Sai asked, surprised.

"We must be," Kakashi sighed, stepping into the ring, "Let's get this over with."

The two Leaf Ninja walked over and positioned themselves at Lee and Sado's respective sides, Sai at Lee's and Kakashi's at Sado's. Since their clash occurred in the air, this meant the Leaf Ninja had to pick the fighters up.

"Okay, so we flew at each other," Sado narrated, being held up by Kakashi, in a kicking pose. "I twisted around to give Lee a clothes liner."

Sado stuck out his arm, and Kakashi awkwardly rotated the star horizontally around.

"But I ducked under," Lee continued, pushing his head back to avoid the 'blow'. "And flipped up with a kick."

Sai, taking that as his cue, began to flip Lee as he describe. At one point, he almost lost his grip on the spandex-clad Ninja, and had to be assisted by Mr. Juuyaku.

Sado took up the narrative again, saying, "I rolled with the punch..."

"Kick." Sai corrected, getting no love for doing so.

"Whatever. Anyway, as I spun around," And Kakashi, with Ken's help, had to flip Sado around, this time vertically. "I decided to give Lee one of my famous Koji Chops, hitting him in the ribs."

Ken pretended to chop at Lee, lightly tapping his chest. Lee faked a grimace of pain.

"I grabbed his hand, and tried to throw him over," Lee continued, taking Sado's hand, "But he kicked off me at the last minute."

With a great deal of awkward help, Lee and Sado acted that out.

"And then we landed." Sado finished, as he and Lee were set down.

" *Incredible! All that happened within the space of second!?"*

"Yes!" Lee and Sado answered, grinning broadly. The crowd voiced its approval.

"Did all that really happen?" Sai asked Kakashi, whispering, as he and the Copy Ninja left the ring.

"Actually," Kakashi confided, "They missed each other completely, and just skinned their shins."

Meanwhile, Lee and Sado were trading blows in the center of the ring again. While they appeared equal, Kakashi couldn't help but notice that Lee was slightly faster than Sado. On the other hand, Sado appeared to be a bit stronger than Lee was, being more muscularly developed. As the fists flew, the Copy Ninja saw that Lee was starting to look pressured- Sado was forcing him down.

Lee better think of something quick, Kakashi thought, Or Sado will overwhelm him.

Lee, beginning to sweat, was having similar thoughts.

I've got break this stalemate! He thought, blocking Sado's punches, But how!?

By some stroke of good fortune, or the result of a cosmic practical joke, Lee found salvation. While trying to roll with one of Sado's stronger blows, Lee spun on his heel- and spun all the way around. As his body twisted, Lee's other leg swung at Sado's fist, kicking it. The kicked fist, its course redirected, flew back at Sado's face!

POW!

There was a sudden silence as everyone stared, watching Sado fall back onto the grass, his knuckles firmly planted into his mug. All was silent, save for Ken's counting.

"...Eight...nine...ten!" Ken finished. He held up an astounded Lee's hand, saying, "The winner!"

The crowd went wild. The girls, in particular, were screaming their disapproval loud enough to shatter glass.

"I-incredible! What an upset! Who would have guess such a high-strung battle could have ended so suddenly!? And by accident, even!"

D a t t e b a y o

"Yesssss!" Guy whooped, "He won! He won!" He flashed Hiashi a Nice-Guy pose. "I told you he could do it!"

"I know, I know..." Hiashi sighed, "Now will you please leave?"

D a t t e b a y o

As the audience's reaction echoed into the skies above, Kakashi and Sai went to Lee's side, while Mr. Juuyaku and Yoko went to Sado's.

"Are you okay?" Kakashi asked, helping Lee up.

"I think so," Lee said dizzily. He had landed on his head. "What happened?"

"You won."

"Oh...good." Lee then fainted.

Off to the side, Mr. Juuyaku and Yoko were busy removing Sado's fist from his face; a delicate procedure, as they did not want to damage it.

"Sado, darling," Mr. Juuyaku gasped, "Are you okay?!"

"Director..." Sado began, spoken slowly, "How'd I look...?"

Mr. Juuyaku choked back tears. "You... You look great, even when you lose, baby!" He sobbed.

Smiling just a little too much, Yoko held out a piece of paper to Sado.

"Could you please sign this?" She asked a bit too sweetly.

"Sure..." Sado said dizzily, signing the paper. "Anything for a fan..."

"Oh, and I'll need a thumb print." Yoko added, grinning tightly.

The conscious ones in the ring watched as Sado pressed his thumb to the paper, with growing trepidation. When the superstar was done, Yoko began to hop up and down, squealing.

"Eeee!" She shrieked, "I did it! I got him to sign the wedding contract!"

Sado's eyes bugged out, his head shot up, and he finally fainted. Ken clapped his hands, laughing.

"There you have it, folks!" Ken cackled, "Lee's goin' on to the semifinals, and Sado's getting' hitched!"

As the audience went wild from the absurdity of it all, Kakashi shook his head.

Only in the Dragon Belt. He thought.

D a t t e b a y o

A/n: Another chapter done! Sorry it took so long! I was having trouble getting my thoughts on this into order. I find that visualizing fights are easier than writing them, so it's hard to come up with the right words for battles. Now for some notes!

Lee's theme song is the *Gash Bell* opening, while Sado's is *Digimon Frontier* 's.

Mr. Juuyaku's name ACTUALLY MEANS director. He's a pastiche of stereotypical Hollywood directors, the kind that say 'darling' and

'you're beautiful'.

Yoko is a shoutout to all those crazy fangirls I see in forums, gushing about how awesome and sexy and cool and etc. a fictional character is. You know who you are.

Now, before you guys review, I have one last quiz for you; Can anyone guess what manga Lee/Sado's 'recreation' is from? First one to get it right appears in the next chapter!

A translation of Sado's moves-

Arata Senkai: New Revolution

Ko Nishi: Old West

Kagaku Itsuwari: Science Fiction

(In case you haven't noticed, I've tried to go with a movie-genre theme for Sado's moves...I think I couldn't get that with the first one...)

Fuji vs YangChen

Opening theme: Bomb A Head (Opening theme for *Tenjou Tenge*)

Chapter 12: Fuji vs Yang-Chen

"... *Winner is Rock Lee!*"

"Alright!" Naruto whooped, "What to go, Lee!"

"Naruto, would you sit still!?" Sakura scolded, though she shared his enthusiasm.

Naruto was in bed back in the medical room at Saotome Hall, along with Kushina, Tayuya, Sakura, Yamato, and Wan.

"I'm gonna go congratulate him!" Naruto declared, and almost leapt out of bed- until an invisible force pushed him back in.

"No, you're gonna sit right there and rest!" Wan ordered, "You still haven't fully recovered from your match with Pandaman."

"But Lee congratulated me!" Naruto whined, "Why can't I do the same?!"

"Just use the phone, Naruto," Yamato said calmly.

"The phone's too impersonal!" Naruto yelled, "I gotta do it face-to-face!"

"Dr. Wan," Sakura said, taking out a roll of bandages, "I think you missed a spot while treating Naruto."

"I did?" Wan asked, confused. "Where?"

Sakura said nothing. She simply applied a bandage over Naruto's mouth, effectively sealing it shut.

"Oh, I see," Wan noted, nodding. "Good call."

Naruto glared.

"In any case, I should be going," Wan said, taking his case. "I need to get to Sonson Fields to treat Lee and Sado."

Wan clapped his hands. A large, hulking figure entered. This being was roughly the size of a bulldozer, and had big, thick hands, covered with metallic gloves. Its gender was indecipherable, as it wore a massive black cloak that covered its entire body, capped off by a skull mask. In its hands it had a large scroll.

As everyone gaped at the newcomer, Wan strolled over and patted the hulk on the shoulder.

"Ninjas," He said, "This is Titan. Titan used to be an ax murderer, but is now into religion. Naruto, you'll be in Titan's caring hands until I get back." To Titan, Wan said, "Make sure he doesn't leave his bed."

Titan nodded, and stomped over to Naruto's bedside, plopping down with an unsightly thud. Everyone else backed away.

"Be good, Naruto!" Wan waved, and vanished.

Everyone stared at the spot where Wan was, and turned their gaze to Titan. The hulk said nothing.

"So, um..." Sakura said nervously, "What's religion like for you?"

D A T T E B A Y O

"...Not as bad as Naruto," Wan said, finishing his treatment of Lee, "But I'd hold off any strenuous activity for the rest of the day."

"Yes, sir!" Lee saluted. He now had numerous bandages all over his body.

"So," Wan stood up and looked around. "Where's Sado? I have to do him, now."

"I saw him being dragged off by that Yoko girl." Sai said, pointing.

"No problem then," Wan said, adjusting his hat. "She'll nurse him back to health, and keep him from aggravating his injuries. Ascended stalkers are like that."

Ascended stalker? The three Leaf Ninja thought, sweating. But before any of them could ask for an explanation, music began to blare out from speakers.

Background Music: Shine Ramenman (Junchiro Oda)

"Now entering from the south-west entrance... From the Land of Waterfalls... The 'Legend'... Yang-Chen!!"

Yang-Chen entered the field, waving passively to the cheering crowd.

"So, it's him..." Kakashi murmured.

"Do you know him?" Lee asked.

"During the 3rd War, he was a powerful force to be reckoned with," Kakashi explained, "But he disappeared not long after the war ended. I wonder what has been doing since then..."

"Is he good?" Sai asked.

"One of the best," Kakashi answered, "Sensei had great respect for his skills."

After Yang-Chen climbed into the ring, another theme song began to play.

Background Music: Ai O Tori Modose

*" Entering from the north-east entrance... From the Land of Earth...
The 'Brawler'... Fuji!!"*

Fuji, in all his glory, stomped out onto the field, returning the audience's screams and hollers with some flexing of the muscles.

D A T T E B A Y O

"Him..." Naruto said, staring at the TV in the room.

"That's one of the bounty hunters, right?" Yamato asked.

" *That's* Fuji?" Tayuya snorted, "The F-er's just another musclehead. What's the big deal?"

"I've never fought a guy like him before," Naruto explained, "He's not afraid to get hurt. Everyone else... The only reason I have such a hard time in fights is that none of the guys I fight want to go at it head-to-head."

"I've been there," Kushina put in, "Some guys only look cool because they don't want to give their opponent a chance to strike back, so they keep their distance." She grinned. "Because they know if they get near me, they're dead!"

"Well, I think this is as far as Fuji gets," Yamato assured, "That old man happens to be an S-class ninjutsu master... Brute force can't beat that."

Naruto didn't answer. He just stared at the screen.

D A T T E B A Y O

"Okay, dudes," Ken said once both fighters were in the ring, "If one of you fall out of the ring for twenty secs, you're out. If you hit the ground and don't get up for ten secs, you're out. If you use a steel weapon, you're out. Get it?"

"Understood." Yang-Chen answered, not taking his eyes off Fuji.

"I got a question, though," Fuji said, cracking his neck. "What happens if someone dies?"

Ken shrugged. "You've signed your waivers, absolving the tournament and all sponsors of any liability. So if the fights go a little too far, you're got only yourself to blame- if you live long enough, though."

Fuji leered at Yang-Chen. "Good, no worries then."

Yang-Chen narrowed his eyes.

Ken raised his hand. "Okay, ready..." He brought his hand down. "Fight!"

As Ken leapt for safety, Fuji and Yang-Chen appraised each other.

"It's time for you to leave, old timer." Fuji said, cracking his knuckles.

"You think you are a match for me?" Yang-Chen asked, making handsigns.

"Not a match..." Fuji smirked, "A forest fire!"

And with that, Fuji swung a massive fist at Yang-Chen. Agile elder jumped out of harms way in time for the punch to miss, landing a few feet away.

"Doton! Daichi no Genkotsu!" He cried, slamming his palm into the ground. The earth shook as a giant stone fist erupted from it, flying at Fuji. Fuji simply pulled his fist back and shot it forward, smashing the rock. As the shrapnel scattered, Fuji saw that Yang-Chen was no longer in sight.

" Yang-Chen gets the battle started with a classic offensive tactic, once used commonly during the 3 rd Great Ninja War!"

"Where'd he..." Fuji turned around in time to see Yang-Chen come at him with fists flying.

"Taijutsu Ougi! Omoi-Kobushi No Ame!"

Yang-Chen began to unleash a flurry of punches directly onto Fuji's chest, his appearing to multiply at the speed he was moving.

" Ahh! Look at Yang-Chen's fists fly! It's like he's become an octopus!"

"That looks like Guy-Sensei's move!" Lee cried, eyes wide.

Kakashi didn't say anything. He just stared impassive.

"...It's not working." He said at last.

"What!? Lee and Sai looked to Kakashi.

Yang-Chen nimbly jumped away to avoid another punch from Fuji, landing at the ring's edge.

His resistance is nothing like I've ever seen before, The old man thought, heaving. To say nothing of his strength! If I try to match him blow for blow I'm finished. Yang-Chen began to make hand-signs. I will have to fight him from a distance...

"Katon!" Yang-Chen pulled his head back. "Kasai-Ryuusui!"

Yang-Chen unleashed a stream of red hot fire from his mouth at Fuji. Fuji managed to bring up his arms to block it just in time.

" Yang-Chen's just turned up the heat! I hope Fuji can take it!"

FWOOSH!

"He's hit!" Lee cried.

"I guess that wraps it up for Fuji," Kakashi noted, "Even if it doesn't budge him, at those temperatures, his body must be completely roasted."

As smoke billowed out from where the flames hit, Yang-Chen breathed a sigh of relief.

"I did not think I would encounter such in the first round..." He remarked, wiping some sweat from his brow. "I should hope the rest of the tournament is trifle easier..."

However before he could make any more hopeful wishes, Fuji burst out from the smoke! Completely shocked, Yang-Chen could not react in time to avoid Fuji's punch, the impact with which sent him flying out of the ring.

" Fuji's has not only withstood the fire, but has responded with a devastating counter! There goes the geezer!"

Yang-Chen crashed into a water cooler, dying the water red with some blood. He didn't get up. As Ken made the count, Wan rushed over to check the elder's condition.

"Stop the count!" He yelled to Ken, "He's not getting up."

Ken shrugged. "Whatever you say, Doc." He raised Fuji's arm into the air. "The winner, Fuji!!"

The crowd roared, voicing its approval.

" And with that, the Dragon Belt Championship Quarterfinals are now over! See you in a week for the Semifinals at Budokai stadium, folks! Good day!"

Off to the side, the Leaf Ninja stared at Fuji, who was busy posturing.

It's impossible to take a fire technique without some kind of special protection, Kakashi thought, What is he? Kakashi then noticed two burn spots on Fuji- one for each arm. So...he WAS effected... physically, at least...

Looking to the side, he saw that while Lee was shivering, the young bowl-cutted one had small smile on his face.

Look at that, Kakashi thought, smiling in spite of himself. He's on his way to what may be his toughest fight yet, and is actually happy about it. These kids are something else... I wonder how you feel... Naruto?

D A T T E B A Y O

A/n: Another fight done. I don't have much to say except the hulking being Wan put in charge of Naruto is Titan, a reviewer who was the first to give a correct answer to last chapter's quiz. I didn't know what Titan wanted to look like or what gender he/she was, so I tried to go for something as vague as possible. Sorry if you are offended Titan.

Also, Yang-Chen's theme song is the opening for *Tatakae Ramenman!*, a spin-off series for Kinnikuman's Ramenman. Fuji's is the opening for *Fist of the North Star*.

TRANSLATIONS

Doton: Daichi no Genkotsu- Earth Release: Fist of Earth

Taijutsu Ougi: Omoi-Kobushi No Ame- Physical Arts Secret Technique: Rain of Heavy Fists

Katon: Kasai-Ryuusui- Fire Release: Fire Stream

Read and Review!

Those Legends

Opening theme: Yahho (Second opening for *History's Strongest Disciple, Kenichi*)

Chapter 13: Those Legends

"... After a series of exhausting battles..." Tsunade said, reading from a newspaper, "The winners of the Dragon Belt Championship quarterfinals are Blind the Buddha, Fuji, Rock Lee, and Uzumaki Naruto."

"It's good to know that Lee and Naruto survived," Shizune noted, holding an armful of documents for Tsunade to sign. "What's more, they're the first Leaf Ninja to make it past the quarterfinals!"

Tsunade chuckled.

"My lady?" Shizune asked.

"Don't you think it's funny," Tsunade asked rhetorically, "That the first Ninja trained in our village to go that far were once assumed failures?"

"W-well, that's interesting..." Shizune considered, thinking about it. "I guess they're tired of being looked down on."

"In a Hidden Village, ninja like them are rejected," Tsunade commented, "But in the Dragon Belt, those same attitudes and abilities are what carried them farther than their comrades."

Shizune thought about it. Traditionally, ninja were supposed to be composed, subtle warriors, who carried out their missions without a word otherwise and with quiet dignity. Naruto and Lee, along with a few others, seemed determined to not just break this tradition, but also smash it to pieces.

"And anyway, what's this 'first to get past' thing?" Tsunade demanded, "The Fourth Hokage made it to the finals, didn't he?"

"Ah, you're right," Shizune admitted. "It's just hard to remember... when compared to the luck OTHER Leaf Ninja have made..." Shizune trailed off.

"Including me and the other Sannin, right?" Tsunade asked dryly. Leaning back in her chair, she said, "You've got a point... Sensei, Orochimaru, Jiraiya, myself... We never got too far in the tournament..."

As Tsunade said this, visions of the past came to her mind...

" Ugh!" A younger Tsunade grunted, being punched out of the ring by man with tribal markings, and severely mutated hand

" That's it...?" He whispered, "Pathetic..."

In another match, Orochimaru found himself being sat on by a tall woman in priestess robes, who was pulling at his tongue.

" Wow, what a long tongue!" She giggled.

" Agh.. Agagagh..." The snake ninja gagged.

And in another match, Jiraiya stood before his opponent, having just been run through the figurative wringer. His opponent, an androgynous man, stared at him, holding a floating ball of ice above his hand.

" Leaf Ninja... Fitting name." That man said, "So fragile and easy to shove aside."

Tsunade couldn't help but chuckle. "I wonder if Naruto and Lee know if they've surpassed their predecessors in that respect..."

D a t t e b a y o

At the edge of the city where the Dragon Belt was held, there was an inn.

This inn, called Osaka's, was where the Uzumaki's were staying for the duration of the tournament.

Upon entering with Team Kakashi III, Sakura couldn't note that it looked like a normal inn- too much like a normal inn. The way Kushina and Naruto had described it, she was expecting something a bit more...colorful.

"And then he tells Lee who decides he wants to stay here too..." Sakura sighed.

"Isn't it easier this way?" Yamato asked, "Since we're not just here as Naruto's backup in case of Akatsuki, but also as representatives of the Leaf, it's more convenient for both facets of our mission to be nearby."

"I guess so..." Sakura considered. She then noticed Sai had a far-off look in his eye. "What's wrong?"

"It's quiet," the Root Ninja told her, "Too quiet for anyplace with Naruto and Lee...and Ms. Uzumaki."

Sakura realized that Sai was right. The entire inn seemed devoid of any sound...almost as if it were all being suppressed by an almighty force.

Kakashi walked up the front desk, where a woman with a name-tag that read 'Yukari' slept.

"Excuse me..." He began pleasantly.

"Yukari's not here, man..." She moaned in her sleep, flip-flopping.

"Do you know where the Uzumaki Family is staying, as well as anyone by the name of Rock Lee?" Kakashi asked, ignoring her narcolepsy.

"T'ere in the cabaret..." Yukari mumbled, burying her head in her arms.

"Thank you." Kakashi stood up and was about to walk away when a thought occurred to him. Turning back to Yukari, he asked, "Where is the cabaret?"

"Downstairs." Was Yukari's sleepy reply.

"And how do we get downstairs?" Kakashi asked, undaunted.

For a brief moment, Yukari actually looked annoyed. But it was brief, and her face resumed its drowsy expression a second afterward. She began to feel around the desk.

"Makin' me do stuff... A'ready got work t'do..." She grumbled, and soon grabbed hold of a lever labeled, 'For Gag use only', and pulled it.

Kakashi, with all the skills only his training and experience as a ninja could give him, narrowly jumped away from the trapdoor being opened under him.

"And what is this?" Kakashi asked, pointing a kunai point into the trapdoor while the rest of the team gathered around him.

"Tha's how you get downstairs..." Yukari mumbled, before falling asleep. Well, more asleep. Team Kakashi III looked down the hole.

"Well, ladies first." Kakashi said jokingly, gesturing to Sakura.

"Oh no!" Sakura yelled, giving her ex-teacher a look. "Age before beauty!"

"But Sakura, you're not..." Sai began, but trailed off when Sakura gave him a look. Suddenly aware of his mortality, and sensing his impending doom several feet away, he said, "I'll go first."

D a t t e b a y o

One slid down a hidden chute later, Team Kakashi III found themselves in a brightly lit, colorfully painted room, filled with café tables, bean bag chairs, and the like. Stuff animals were scattered all over the place, and the waiters and waitresses were dressed up as rabbits, cats, and penguins. Almost everyone were wearing outfits that looked painful to look at. At the back was a large stage.

"Wha... What the hell is this?" Sakura gaped, "What's with this insane circus!?"

"Hey! Sakura!"

Sakura turned around to find Naruto, who was also dressed in a colorblind outfit, complete with several shiny pins that added to the glare.

"What are you doing here?" He asked, oblivious to her gawking.

"What are you wearing!?" She screamed, pointing.

"What, this?" Naruto asked, checking himself out. "These are casual clothes."

"That's casual?" Yamato asked, sweating.

"I feel overdressed." Sai commented.

"Come on," Naruto said, walking over to the tables. "I'll pull up some chairs for you at our table."

Naruto led Team Kakashi III to a table in the center where Lee and Kushina were, also dressed in outlandish outfits.

"Sakura!" Lee greeted, "It is good to see you!"

"Hi, Lee," Sakura said tiredly. "Don't tell me. These are your casual clothes."

"How did you guess?" Lee asked, a thick eyebrow shooting up.

"Shot in the dark."

Kakashi was already reading Make-Out Tactics . He only read about six words when the lights dimmed, save for the ones over the stage. A nearby band began to play ragtime.

" *Ladies and gentlemen!*" An lady emcee dressed in a playboy bunny suit announced through a microphone, "*Making his grand entrance... the owner of the Osaka Inn and Delux Café...Wakimoto Osaka!!*"

The curtains around the stage opened up, revealing what must have been the largest man Team Kakashi III had ever seen. This towering hulk seemed to be three times the size of Jiraiya, and had a man of long, wild, grey hair that was only kept from springing everywhere by a bunny cap. His face was riddled with scars, and each eye was a different color, one yellow, one purple. To cap the whole insane look, he only wore a grass skirt, sandals, and a t-shirt that said, CYBERPANDA.

"Hey there, kiddies!" He yelled out, "Is everyone having a good time today!?"

Everyone screamed an affirmative. Sakura screamed as well, but for entirely different reasons. Taking that as his cue, Osaka began to sing.

" *Hey there good times here I am*

" *Welcome back your baby lamb*

" *Open wide them golden doors*

And set my chair down next to yours!"

That was as far as the giant got, as an explosion of smoke knocked him off the stage. There, in the center stage, was a toad the size of a bull, and on it was a man. And not just any man.

"That man whose legend goes beyond the Hidden Villages, the one who's appearance can bring light to even the darkest fates.... Left, right, up, down! Everywhere you turn, Jiraiya, the Toad Sage has appeared!" Jiraiya declared, striking a pose atop his toad.

Everyone stared in amazement at the perverted sage's grand entrance. Sakura couldn't help but note that while his kabuki outfit always looked outlandish, compared to the absurd fashions worn by most of the cabaret staff and customers, it seemed almost humble by comparison.

"Ero-Sennin..." Naruto stared up at his mentor, too stunned to speak.

"Heheh... How ya feel, Naruto?" Jiraiya greeted, "You've done pretty well so far..."

"You ruined my song!" Osaka roared, leaping up and tackling Jiraiya off his toad. The two began to wrestle with each other.

"Yeah!" Everyone except for the ninja cheered, "Fight fight fight fight!"

The Uzumaki family and the Leaf Ninja stared at the grappling warriors.

"Please, excuse him." Someone said. Looking to the source of the voice, the ninja saw an professional woman in a business suit, her brown hair tied into a ponytail.

"Mr. Wakimoto usually is more restrained than this," she said, adjusting her glasses, "But ever since he retired from his old career of highway robbery, that stage is the only place he can work out his hyperactivity. I'm Kuriko, manager of the Osaka Inn."

"Nice to meet you." Yamato greeted, nodding. He glanced over where the old timers were fighting. "Did you say 'highway robbery?'"

Kuriko nodded. "Wakimoto Osaka used to be the leader of a feared gang of bandits that disbanded following the end of the 3rd Great Ninja War."

"And how does a bandit lord end up running an inn?" Kakashi asked, not looking up from his book.

"With time and patience." Kuriko replied, adjusting her glasses. "That's not surprising, though. Lots of legends from those days have either retired or gotten killed. Your Lord Jiraiya, if I'm correct, is one of the wealthiest retired legend in the world."

Yamato, Sakura, and Lee stared in amazement. Kakashi raised an eye from the book, Sai looked indifferent, Kushina looked thoughtful, while Naruto nodded his head.

"You're kidding, right?" Sakura asked, "How could Lord Jiraiya possible have that kind money?"

"Well," Jiraiya said, rubbing his chin smugly, ("Hey, when'd you stop fighting?" Naruto asked) "It helps that I'm such a successful novelist, you know."

"Successful novelist?" Sakura repeated, unconvinced, "You write pornography!"

"It's because his target market are single, socially-inept men who have no chance of even getting to first base with women," Explained Kuriko, "So I've heard."

Everyone slowly turned to Kakashi, who had begun to grip the pages of his book rather tightly.

"What?" Kakashi asked, trying to sound uninterested.

"Besides, that's not so crazy compared to this," Osaka said, now sitting in a beanbag chair with a stuffed Ultraman doll. "I've heard

that one of the Seven Swordsmen of the Mist is living in your Hidden Village right now, working in food preparation."

"What?!"

"Someone like Zabuza and Kisame, in the village!?" Naruto cried, "Who!?"

D a t t e b a y o

"Here's your order, Iruka." Teuchi said, holding out a bowl of ramen.

D a t t e b a y o

"...But the real frenzy is centered around you, blondie," Osaka said to Naruto. "No one's seen a Whirlpooler since Kushina. Most descendents stay out of the fighting game."

That reminded Sakura of a question she wanted to ask Kushina. "Ms. Kushina, why is Naruto registered as a citizen of this...Land of Whirlpools? He's from the Leaf Village."

"No he's not." Kushina said simply.

"I'm not??" Naruto asked, shocked.

"You were born at home," Kushina explained, "But Minato needed you back at the Hidden Leaf so he could seal the Ninetailed Fox into you."

Naruto leaned back in his chair. So that was it. The Ninetailed Fox didn't just take away his father, but also a very different life...maybe a better one than what he was living now. And that brought up a question...

"Mama, what's the Land of Whirlpools like?" He asked.

Kushina looked away, obviously uncomfortable. "W-why do you ask?"

"Because I wanna visit!" Naruto said, "If that place is my homeland, don't you think I should stop by once and a while?"

Kushina, shaking, wiped a tear away from her eye. "That's sweet, Naruto... But the Land of Whirlpools doesn't exist, anymore..."

"What...?" Naruto went very still.

"When the Ninetailed Fox attacked the Leaf sixteen years ago," Kushina explained, not meeting anyone's eyes. "It sent several windstorms at the villages. One of those storms missed the village. As it reached and went across the ocean, it built up speed and power, transforming into a hurricane to end all hurricanes. The human civilization in the Land of Whirlpools was wiped out in a day." She began to shake again. "All my friends...neighbors...everyone... gone."

There was a sorrowful silence, save for the ragtime music being played. Then...

"SHUT UP, YOU *&#\$S!!" An angry voice screeched, as three monstrous ogre-like beasts, with their eyes, ears, and mouths stitched shut leapt out from no where and began to knock over tables.

"Ah, that's right, it's Tayu-chan's solo." Osaka realized, watching the monsters vanish from sight.

The curtains on the stage opened, revealing Tayuya sitting on a pillow. She began to play her flute. A lone, somber melody filled the air.

"She's actually good..." Sakura admitted, in spite of herself.

With everyone's attention on Tayuya, Kakashi took this moment to ask Jiraiya quietly, "Did you talk to her?"

Jiraiya nodded. "Yes. She honestly doesn't remember crucial details about Orochimaru. I doubt even Ibiki could get anymore out of her. That information's probably useless anyway, considering Orochimaru treats resources like fashions. Throws away one for another."

Kakashi sighed. "Oh well. Worth a shot."

Meanwhile, Osaka was telling Lee, Yamato, and Sai about what Tayuya did at the Inn.

"She started working here about a year ago," He said, "Sometimes she plays with the band, sometimes she plays alone like now...either way, it's good music."

As Tayuya reached the end of her solo, Naruto leaned to his mother.

"Maybe there's no one living there," He said quietly, "But I still wanna go to the Land of Whirlpools... I wanna see my old home."

Kushina looked at Naruto's earnest face and smiled in spite of herself.

"And I'm gonna win," Naruto continued, pumping his arm, "For the Whirlpool!"

"I'm still *#\$ playing!!" Tayuya snarled, launching her flute at Naruto's face with deadly accuracy.

D a t t e b a y o

A/N: So, this was just a little breather chap, some pointless fun jammed in-between the tournament. Here's some data and the two OCs I introduced.

Wakimoto Osaka- Once the leader of a feared bandit gang, his obsession with cute things led to the group's disbanding following the end of the 3rd Ninja War. Has six offspring and thirty-six grandchildren, some of which help out at the Inn.

Kuriko(No first name given)- Used to be a high-ranking member of the Gato Syndicate, left the group after Gato's death in the Land of Waves. Provided Osaka with the seed money to found the Inn, a loan that remains unpaid to this day.

Also, those characters that kicked the Sannin's butts in past Dragon Belts, they're ancestors to certain characters from the manga and anime. I won't be giving names, since they're unimportant. Here they are;

Tsunade's opponent- Juugo's grandfather. Good at mutating his body, but nothing like what Juugo can do now. He cheated by spitting in Tsunade's eye.

Orochimaru's opponent- Shion's grandmother. She used her ability to foresee and subvert her death to predict Orochimaru's moves, since he's the kind who 'goes for the kill' even when he doesn't have to.

Jiraiya's opponent- Haku's grandfather. Jiraiya originally thought he was a woman and tried hit on him.

Before we go, I would like to say to anyone who thinks that Teuchi being a former ally of Zabuza and Kisame is too wild... we know NOTHING about this guy, so unless canon says so, I'm going to declare Teuchi being a former Mist-Ninja a new theory...even if there is no basis besides idle speculation.

Well, READ AND REVIEW!

Uzumaki Naruto vs Blind the Buddha

Opening theme: Yahho (Second opening for *History's Strongest Disciple Kenichi*)

Chapter 14: Uzumaki Naruto vs Blind the Buddha

Lord Hyuuga Hiashi quickly checked around. None of them were already in the manor, and the guards had already been notified to keep it that way. He could now watch the Dragon Belt in peace!

That's what Hiashi was thinking when he entered his living room...

"Hey! What kept you, Hyuuga!?"

...And met Tsunade, sitting on the floor a few feet away from his big screen. She had a jug of sake next to her.

"...What are you doing here, Lady Hokage?" Hiashi asked, trying not to groan.

"Taking some time off to watch the Dragon Belt," Tsunade explained, "I heard you had a big screen, and thought it would be perfect!"

Perfect for what? Hiashi thought gloomily. "Don't you have work to do, my lady?" Is what he asked instead.

"I've already got it done," Tsunade replied, waving a dismissive hand. "And besides, it's important for the Hokage to support the Village's representative, even from a distance. Now shut up, Naruto's match is on!"

D a t t e b a y o

At Tenkaichi Stadium, audience capacity was at 100 percent. In the center of the field, a large stone ring had been set up, and standing in the center was Chan Ken.

Somewhere in the audience, Kakashi, Yamato, and Sai were acting as vendors, selling peanuts, popcorn, and crackerjack. It was the only way they could get into the Stadium without buying tickets, though Yamato was dismayed to find the commissions for sales were better than the commissions for shinobi missions.

Adjacent to the ring, a medical support tent had been set up, headed by Dr. Tai Wan and Sakura.

"Thanks for letting me help, Doctor." Sakura said to Wan.

"The only reason you're here is because Titan called in sick," Wan pointed out, "So don't get cocky...or violent."

"Ladies and gentlemen!" Ken called out, "Welcome to the Dragon Belt Championship Semifinals!"

The crowd cheered. Somewhere in the Land of Wind, Gaara wondered what that soft din was.

"Out of the two-hundred and forty-two entrants, only four remain," Ken continued, "And these four, are without a doubt, the wildest this tournament has ever seen!"

"...The maverick Uzumaki Naruto!"

"...The enigmatic Blind the Buddha!"

"...The hair-trigger Rock Lee!"

"...And the brash Fuji, a quartet of competition you may not see again! Which two out of And so, without further ado, let the Semifinal match 1 begin!"

Background Music: ROCKS (By Hound Dog)

*" Now entering from the west wing... From the Land of Whirlpools...
Accompanied by the Queen...and the Legend... The Hero...
Uzumaki Naruto!"*

The crowd cheered as Naruto, with Jiraiya at his left side and Kushina at his right, walked up to the ring. As the crowd cheered, Naruto pulled himself through the ropes. After he was through, he walked to the center and waved.

"You feel good, blondie?" Ken asked.

"As good as I'll ever be." Naruto responded, flashing a shaky smile.

"Cool."

Background music: Velonica (Aqua Timez)

" Now entering from the east wing... Accompanied by the Brawler... The Samurai... Blind the Buddha!"

Blind strolled onto the field, Fuji at her heels. Unlike at Saotome Hall, Blind wasn't wandering about, and was instead heading directly toward the ring. Behind him, Fuji shrugged.

"You know, I don't think that guy's blind at all." Jiraiya commented.

"But how can he see?" Kushina wondered, "I don't see any holes in that mask."

As Blind entered the ring, the background music faded to an end. He walked toward the center of the ring up to Naruto. Naruto glared at the masked man, remembering...

" Let me see those cute whiskers again!" Muneko squealed, pushing Naruto out of her chest, allowing him to catch his breath. Before he could get his bearings, Muneko pressed her lips down onto his cheek.

And then...

" Die." Blind said.

What the audience saw next was Muneko jolting horribly from some unknown force, before collapsing on the mat.

Naruto clenched his fist and pointed at Blind.

"I'm gonna beat you!" He yelled.

"You can try..." Blind said in a soft voice, " *Demon baby...* "

Naruto froze. "Wha... What did you say...?"

"And now," Ken said, Unaware and uncaring of the dialogue between the two. "I give you our referee, Mr. Yowamushi!"

The potbellied, mustachioed referee climbed into the ring, greeted by some polite applause. He was wearing a pair of safety goggles.

"You can never be too carefull, I've noticed of late." Mr. Yowamushi explained.

"And with those insightful words," Ken yelled, biding a hasty retreat. "Let the first Semifinal match begin!"

DING!

Naruto wasted no time. The second the bell rang, he charged at Blind, making handsigns.

" *Kage Bushin no Jutsu!* "

Three clones appeared and jumped at Blind from all sides. But Blind easily ducked and dodged the clones' assaults, counter-striking each one.

"Now for the original." Bind muttered, and lunged at Naruto. The whiskered one caught both of Blind's arms in mid-strike, and swung his legs into Blind's, sending them both to the ground.

" *It appears that Naruto is attempting to drag Blind down with him!*"

But while they were falling, Blind spun on the momentum Naruto's leg-sweep caused, and threw Naruto away. As the Buddha halted his plummet with his hand, two more shadow clones lunged at Blind, each holding a Rasengan.

" *Tatsumaki Jigokuou!* "

Blind did a bizarre spin on his hands, creating a whirlwind and sending the clones flying.

"Dammit..." Naruto growled as the clones dissipated.

Over where Kushina, Jiraiya, and Ken were seated (In lawn chairs!), Kushina cursed.

"He was so close!" She groaned.

"No...he wasn't," Jiraiya replied, "Blind seems to know everything that's going on in the ring...a sneak attack is impossible."

Back in the ring, Blind rushed at Naruto.

"My turn." He said calmly.

Upon reaching Naruto, Blind jabbed his finger into Naruto's arm.

"Argh!" Naruto grunted, and swung with his other arm. Blind caught the punch and forcibly poked another point in the first arm.

" *Blind is now poking Naruto's arm, though it doesn't seem to be causing that much pain!*"

Says him...! Naruto thought, struggling to get free, *This is worse than a shot!*

After Blind had poked Naruto's arm three more times, the Leaf Ninja was able to get free by having the bright idea of using his unrestrained legs against Blind's unprotected stomach. As Naruto

put some distance between him and the masked one, he realized he couldn't feel his arm. It hung limply at his side.

"What the...?!" Naruto tried to force his lifeless limb into motion, but it wouldn't respond. "What is this!?"

"I've cut off the flow of chakra in that arm by pushing pressure points," Blind said calmly, "Without both arms, you can't use your ninjutsu, and without your ninjutsu...you can't win."

" What tragedy! Naruto's arm has been rendered useless! Is the match over?!"

"I've still got my other arm!" Naruto roared, "I can still win this!"

"Spare me." Blind replied.

Naruto, thoroughly incensed, charged at Blind, his arm waving behind him like a flag. Blind stayed his ground, blocked an incoming punch, blocked an incoming punch, gave Naruto a shove on the belly and tossed him away. However, he neglected to block the powerless arm that flailed him by accident.

D a t t e b a y o

Up in the audience, section D, Kakashi said to Yamato over the radio, "Tenzo, do you see what I see?"

" What do you mean?"

"Hey, buddy," A man in a straw hat said, "I'll have some peanuts, please."

"The way Blind is hitting Naruto... You've seen it before too." Kakashi said.

"Excuse me?" The man persisted, "Sir?"

" Now that you mention it, it does seem familiar..."

"If I were a bit closer, I could verify it..." Kakashi mused.

"Are you listening?" the man asked, "I want some peanuts, hello?"

" Maybe Sakura has picked up something. She is on the ground."

"Gimme your cane, ma." The man said to the lady next to him.

"I hope so..." Kakashi sighed, "See any suspicious activity?"

**WHACK* "OW!"*

"What happened?" Kakashi asked, on alert.

" Some man just hit me. He wanted a drink."

It was at that moment that the man in the straw hat, with a cry of "Peanuts!" gave Kakashi a good whack upside the head with his mother's cane, knocking the Copy Ninja to ground.

"I think I understand." Kakashi replied, wondering where the respect an elite ninja gets went to.

D a t t e b a y o

Back in the ring, Blind had stood up, somewhat shaken by the unexpected blow from Naruto's supposedly ineffective arm.

"You brought this on yourself," He said, putting the edges of his palms together, extending six fingers. "I gave you the chance to surrender quietly, but you had to be stubborn."

"Get used to it," Naruto retorted, "I've been stubborn my whole life."

("Believe it," Kushina whispered to Jiraiya, "He wouldn't go to bed without his favorite blanket as a baby, he won't go down for some Buddha.")

"So be it." Blind said calmly, and rushed at Naruto. Once he was close enough, Blind pressed his hands against Naruto's stomach.

"Hexagon Pressure!!"

Naruto gave a sudden jolt, strong enough to lift him a foot in the air for a second, before falling on his back.

"Begin the count." Blind ordered Mr. Yowamushi, but the referee wasn't listening.

"Fancy that..." Yowamushi said, reading a newspaper. "A bad day for Virgos today! Glad I was born in June..."

"Hey!"

"Hmm? Oh, right." Mr. Yowamushi got up and began to count.

"One...Two...Three..."

Over by the medic tent, Sakura looked horrified. Blind's last move looked painfully familiar.

"Dr. Wan!" She cried, "Blind's technique...!"

"I know," Wan sighed, "It's like the one used to bring down Muneko... only stronger, I bet."

"Get up, Naruto!" Kushina yelled, "That wasn't even a love-tap! Move!"

"Seven..." Mr. Yowamushi continued, "Eight...Hmm?"

Naruto, shaking like a leaf, stood up.

" *He...He's back up! Naruto is back up!!*"

"How did you survive that?" Blind asked, "I was sure to strike your stomach."

"Ha! My stomach's taken worse than that!" Naruto bragged, remembering the time, as a six-year-old, he had swallowed an entire bottle of weed killer. (His life was that bad.) He had hurt for hours, and couldn't eat anything with real taste to it, but was fine a few days later. That little suicidal experience had toughened his stomach to inhuman degrees.

"That may be true..." Blind conceded, "But can you take that again?"

Crap, he's right! Naruto thought, panicking. *There's no way I can survive another one of those weird hits! I gotta do something...* Far off in the back of his mind, he heard the siren song of the Ninetailed Fox, offering some power. Pushing that even further back, Naruto quickly reviewed what he could do. *Right arm's useless, but I can still use my left...my head, my legs...hmmm...*

"Your silence is very reassuring." Blind said, and charged.

Let's hope this works! Naruto thought, and began to concentrate. All the chakra in his system began to focus and gather at the bottoms of his feet, causing the ground underneath to crumble somewhat. As soon as Blind was three feet away from Naruto, the chakra exploded, blasting Naruto off- and into Blind.

"Remarkable! Naruto's become a human fireworks! Blasting off with a sudden burst of power!"

"Get off me!" Blind snarled, and swatted Naruto off. But as Naruto was thrown off, he caught something in his hand.

Blind's mask.

"Huh?" Naruto said dumbly. He looked to Blind and saw something he never thought he'd see in his opponent.

Pale skin. Pure white eyes. Surrounded by veins.

The Byakugan.

Looking down, Naruto also saw that his stunt had also ripped the top front piece of Blind's costume, revealing breasts underneath.

"You..." Naruto stammered, "You're a...Hyuuga?"

Blind, Byakugan still active, glared at Naruto.

"I am...was...Hyuuga Himari," She said, "The buried heir."

"What...What is this!? Blind the Buddha is a member of the Hidden Leaf's Hyuuga Clan!?"

D a t t e b a y o

"The hell!? That's a Hyuuga!" Tsunade yelled, and threw an empty pretzel bowl at the shocked Hiashi. "What's going on!?"

But Hiashi didn't answer. He was staring at the screen.

D a t t e b a y o

"I was born the middle triplet between my brothers, Hiashi and Hizashi," Blind explained, "But, though I was the daughter of the clan leader, there was no way I could become a member of the Main house, or even the Branch house.

"You see, I was blind since birth.

"The Hyuuga are famed for possessing the all-seeing Byakugan, a bloodline power that grants the wielder power strong enough to see over great distances, through solid objects, and the flow of chakra. A Hyuuga who didn't even have normal eyesight was a disgrace. A freak accident, a mistake by nature. I would have been killed to protect the clan's pride, but my father could not go through with it. Instead, I was hidden, tucked away in some secret room in our manor, kept out of sight, and out of mind, like a bad piece of art that could not be put on display, but considered too valuable to destroy.

"I wish they had killed me.

"I had nothing, and no one to talk to, only the occasional servant who had lost the draw to bring me food...when they remembered. But, I had a secret that I kept to myself. Of all the Hyuuga clan, my Byakugan was the strongest. I could see past the walls of my glorified dungeon, into even the most private places...even past the walls of the village. With that, I learned many things nobody else knew until it was too late... Orochimaru's experiments on his fellows, the formation of the Root division, the Fourth Hokage's secret romance with that foreign kunoichi...I saw it all. And with that I learned the Gentle Fist practiced by my clan, along with several other styles, by pure observation. I knew more about the village than even the Third Hokage, but it wasn't enough. No matter how much I could see, it was all worthless if I remained a prisoner of my family's pride. I needed a miracle.

"And the Ninetailed Fox...delivered that miracle.

"What do you mean?" Naruto asked, somewhat disturbed by her story.

"Before the Fourth Hokage could seal the Fox inside of you," Blind answered, "The demon had already killed numerous people, and destroyed parts of the Village even before it was in sight. One part was the Hyuuga manor. With the house in chaos, it was easy to slip away...I even killed a Main house Hyuuga who resembled me to fake my apparent death. As I fled the village, I felt more alive than I ever was in my life. I was free. Free to do what I wanted...

"But I wasn't. As long as I was a Hyuuga, anyone who saw me would know I was from the Leaf Village. The clan would soon find out I was alive, and try to take me back, to return me to my prison. I became Blind the Buddha to gain the freedom escape the prison that was Hyuuga Himari."

Jiraiya turned to Ken and asked, "Did you know that?"

Ken shrugged. "She never gave me this spiel, but I knew she was a Hyuuga since the diving event."

"And you didn't think to tell anyone?" Jiraiya asked.

"Hey, I figured when her disguise slipped, the reveal would boost ratings." Ken replied.

Back in the ring, Blind positioned her hands the way she did for the Hexagon Pressure, only with four fingers sticking out on each.

"After this, I will be hunted by my own blood," Blind said, "But before I leave, we must finish the fight. I nearly killed you with the Hexagon Pressure; The Octagon Pressure will pave out a smooth tunnel in your abdomen. Here I come!"

" Uh oh! Blind is on the attack! And Naruto's arm is still immobile! This next blow might end the fight, and Naruto's life!"

"He's going to get killed!" Sakura cried, terrified. She said to Wan, "He can barely stand, stop the fight!"

"I can't, interference would get Naruto disqualified." Wan said, grimacing.

"And if you don't, Naruto will die!" Sakura screamed.

"Life or death isn't the problem here," Wan said, closing his eyes. "The Fourth Hokage assured Kushina and I that the seal holding the Fox would allow Naruto to live out his natural lifespan, maybe even increase it- He can't die."

Sakura said nothing. She just looked out toward the ring.

"But no matter what happens, win or lose- Naruto wants to finish this fight by himself," Wan continued, "He doesn't want to be someone who needs to be protected and rescued all the time- I'm sure of it."

Back in the ring, Naruto had decided there was only one course of action- crazy as it was. However, with Blind bringing an game-breaking technique onto him, and being unable to create clones, all he could do were crazy.

Here goes nothing... Naruto thought, and held up his hand. In his palm, a small ball of swirling chakra began to form.

"Hey, what's that he's doing?" Ken asked.

"Minato's Rasengan..." Kushina breathed, "He can do it one-handed? He always used clones when we were sparring."

Jiraiya nodded. "Naruto originally needed a clone to maintain the chakra, because back then his control sucked. He can create a Rasengan alone, but decided that method takes too long. Plus, the clone can perform additional Ninjutsu while he's using the Rasengan. But with only one hand, it's all he's got."

Back in the ring, Naruto decided Blind was now close enough to put his gamble into action. Concentrating, he began to add wind chakra to the Rasengan. His palm shook as he struggled to maintain the sphere.

Now! Naruto thought, and thrust the ball towards Blind. The resulting explosion of wind blasted both Naruto and Blind off their feet, sending them flying towards the edges of the ring. Naruto was saved from a ring out by catching his limp arm on Mr. Yowamushi's leg, inadvertently sending the ref down onto his head.

"Uhh!" Mr. Yowamushi grunted, and rubbed his sore noggin. "Maybe I should retire."

"Hey...ref..." Naruto groaned, "What happened with Blind...?"

"Hmm, what indeed..." Mr. Yowamushi mused, and strolled over to where Blind should've been. The disguised Hyuuga was lying face up in the grass, with a dazed yet pained expression on her face. After taking a moment to check whether or not Blind was awake (She wasn't), Mr. Yowamushi did the count. As he was counting, he walked over to Naruto, and reaching ten, held up the Leaf Ninja's arm.

"The winner!" Mr. Yowamushi declared, and the crowd cheered.

D a t t e b a y o

"What happened?" Sai asked over the radio.

"Naruto used the Wind Release: Rasengan on Blind at the last minute." Kakashi replied.

"What? How?" Sai asked again, "I thought he couldn't maintain the technique without the aid of clones."

"You're right, he couldn't... Any attempt to do so resulted in the Rasengan exploding. Naruto used that to his advantage...He's probably the first Ninja to use a failure to create success..."

Sai stared down at the field. "And everyone calls Naruto an idiot for some reason..."

D a t t e b a y o

Back on the field, as Naruto was being hugged from Kushina, patted on the back from Jiraiya, and healed by Sakura, Wan tended to Blind.

"Tough luck," He said, laughing. "But, you can't win 'em all!"

"Some of us would settle for a tie." Blind replied sullenly.

Wan chuckled, and applied one last bandage to Blind's face. "I assume you're going back into hiding, with a new identity?"

"I have to," She answered, "As Himari, I have no freedom."

"Maybe Himari could get some freedom for herself," Wan suggested, "Instead of asking for someone else's freedom. Naruto's fighting for freedom himself, I think. But he's not hiding for it."

Himari looked over to see Kakashi, Yamato and Sai join Naruto's family.

"Hmph..." She said, thinking of her own distant 'family'. "Lucky duck."

Dragon Belt Championship Semifinal match 1- Uzumake Naruto vs Blind the Buddha

Winner- Uzumaki Naruto

D a t t e b a y o

A/n: Another match finished! I should say, this one took the longest to complete(And if it didn't, it feels that way to ME). When I first came up with Blind the Buddha back when writing *Quest For Mama* , the concept of him/her being a defected Hyuuga from the beginning. I thought the twist would be delicious. However, her attacks were based on another story idea, where somewhere along the way, Hinata fights an Ashura and he uses his six arms for that move.

Tatsumaki Jigokuo- Hell King's Twister

Anyway, read and Review!

Rock Lee vs Fuji

Opening theme: Yahho (Second opening theme for *History's Strongest Disciple, Kenichi*)

Chapter 15: Rock Lee vs Fuji

" Hello, and welcome back to the Dragon Belt Championship Semifinals! If you are just tuning in, let me, Zakomaru Ari, fill you in on what just transpired!

" The previous match between the No. 1 Maverick Ninja Uzumaki Naruto and the mysterious masked warrior, Blind the Buddha, started out one-sided, with Blind successfully countering all of Naruto's attacks.

" However, Naruto inadvertently revealed that Blind was actually the sister of the Hyuuga Clan's leader, Himari, who's existence was kept secret due to her normal eyesight being impaired.

" Fearing that her unmasking would lead to her being imprisoned again by the family she escaped, Blind attempted to kill Naruto in revenge for the unmasking he had done. Naruto countered with an exploding Rasengan, winning the match and securing his place in the finals!"

"Everything sounds less cool when that guy says it." Naruto griped.

He, along with Kushina, Sakura, and Jiraiya, were walking down to the changing room where Lee was, hoping to wish him luck in his match against Fuji.

"That's because he has to summarize what happened within the space of thirty seconds," Jiraiya explained, "And anyway, as a ninja, you can't be concerned with looking cool."

" You're telling me that?" Naruto asked sardonically, thinking of all of Jiraiya's wild introductions.

D a t t e b a y o

Meanwhile, another person was on her way to the changing room. Unlike Naruto and this family, this lady was not a ninja in any way. And, she was not interested in seeing Lee.

Shion(From Naruto Shippuden Movie)

It hadn't been easy arranging passage to the Land of Dragons, but Shion had done it. The real trick was getting out of the Land of Demons without attracting attention. But now that she was here... and so was he.

Shion turned down another corner and found herself walking alongside another girl, this one with reddish hair kept tucked under a cap of sorts.

Amaru (From Naruto Shippuden Movie 2)

They walked silently for about a minute, before Shion broke the lull in dialogue.

"Do you work here?" She asked tentatively.

"Mm, no," Amaru replied, just as tentatively. "I'm just visiting a friend."

"Who?" Shion asked a little too quickly.

"Oh, uh, just some guy," Amaru answered, looking away. "And you?"

"Same here." Shion replied, looking at her feet.

There was another lull in the dialogue, and for a moment, the hall was peaceful. Then, the two girls exchanged looks- and broke into a run.

D a t t e b a y o

"Good luck with your match, Lee," Sakura said.

The bowl-cutted one in question was busy doing stretches and calisthenics in preparation for the battle to come.

"Thank you Sakura," He replied, "I will need it for my fight with Fuji."

Lee thought back to the brief scuffle he and Shikamaru had with Fuji in the seas surrounding the Land of Waves.

Shikamaru grinned. The Shadow Possession Technique had succeeded. "Now, Lee!"

"Right!" Lee leapt at Fuji, swinging his leg around in a roundhouse kick. "Leaf Hurricane!"

Fuji looked shocked for a moment, then smirked. A mere moment away from Lee's kick connecting did he suddenly bring up his arm, blocking it. Lee fell to the deck, clutching his leg, while Shikamaru fell clutching his arm. Fuji appeared unaffected.

"M-my leg...!" Lee groaned in agony.

"He is much stronger than any man I have fought," Lee admitted, "This will not be an simple fight."

"You know anything about Fuji?" Naruto asked of his mentor.

Jiraiya rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Truthfully, no, not much. Most of my sources are busy keeping track of Akatsuki. However, I have noticed that this Fuji seems to rely on his brute strength more than anything."

"I have noticed that as well," Lee said, "So, I have prepared a strategy for that..."

There was a noise at the door, like two coconuts being thrown at it from at the beginning of the hall.

"What's that?" Kushina asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Around here, could be anything." Jiraiya said.

Naruto, with mixed feelings, reached for the door knob and pulled. Into the room, and onto him, fell Shion and Amaru.

"Ack!"

"Naruto!" The two girls cried, and then glared daggers at each other.

Everyone else stared at this happenstance with mixed expressions. Jiraiya looked amused, Sakura was annoyed, Lee and Kushina looked dumbfounded.

"Who are those girls?" Kushina asked, pointing.

"Well, that platinum blond is Shion, High Priestess of the Land of Demons," Jiraiya explained, "And the red-head's Amaru, someone Naruto met during that skirmish with the Sky Ninja."

"So, what are you two doing here?" Naruto asked, getting up, a feat made difficult by the fact that neither girl wanted to get off.

"Well, I heard-" Shion began.

"-I wanted to visit you," Amaru cut in.

"-Entered the country..."

"Walked the entire way here..."

"Bought backstage pass..."

"Snuck past the guards..."

"Do you mind!?" Both girls snarled at each other.

Naruto, more than a little put off by Shion and Amaru's rather jumbled explanation, leaned to Sakura and whispered, "I don't get it."

Sakura rolled her eyes. Naruto had always been clueless about girls, and nothing less subtle than a figurative sledgehammer would make him wise up. "What don't you get?"

"Well, Shion and Amaru are intelligent, independent girls," Naruto went on, "Why're are they acting like you and Ino?"

"Naruto..." Sakura was about to explain that when two girls are fixated on something, or someone, they tended to view anyone who was also interested as definite obstacles when she realized how Naruto phrased his question. "Whaddya mean by *that*!?" "

D a t t e b a y o

Outside the stadium entrance, the man running the box office was incredibly bored. After the initial rush of tournament fans in the morning, things had slowed down to a standstill.

For a brief moment, he considered taking a break. After all, almost all of the tickets were sold, except for one that had been reserved ahead of time, and it looked like no one else was com-

Wait, he saw something coming. It looked like a large dust cloud... and it was getting bigger...

CRASH!

The box office running stared at the heap beneath the booth.

"Can I help you?" He asked.

"I...reserved a ticket..." The green heap moaned.

D a t t e b a y o

Back on the field, minutes before the last semifinal could begin, Dr. Tai Wan was reunited with Sakura at the medical tent. The big-foreheaded kunoichi had a scowl the size of the aforementioned forehead.

"What's wrong?" The psychic doctor asked, raising an eyebrow.

Sakura grunted, and pointed to the left. Close to the ring a large picnic blanket had been set up, with Naruto, Kushina, Jiraiya, Shion and Amaru carrying away on it. Shion and Amaru were both busy trying to hold Naruto's attention from the other, and feat made difficult by Naruto's verbal insistence that the Lee-Fuji match begin.

"Ahh, it's okay," Wan said, patting Sakura on the head. "If you want to party on with your friends, I won't mind. I'll just pull you over here in case of an emergency."

"That's not why I'm upset!" Sakura snapped, going red as Amaru leaned onto Naruto a little too much. Shion, not to be outdone, did the same. However, before Naruto could point out how uncomfortable this was, Ken spoke up from the ring.

"And now, ladies and gents!" The superstar proclaimed, "It's time for the Semifinal second round!"

Background Music: Kasabuta (by Hidenori Chiwata)

" Now entering from the east entrance... From the Land of Fire... 'The Soldier'... Rock Lee!!"

Lee marched onto the field, standing tall, erect, and proud. As the crowd cheered, Lee did a magnificent double-flip into the ring, electing even more cheers.

"He certainly looks energetic." Kushina laughed, "But focused, too."

"The old timers say the Leaf needs more genius' like Kakashi and Minato," Jiraiya commented, "But I think what we need even more

are 'failures' like Naruto and Lee."

"Go, Lee!" Naruto whooped, "Win this thing and we'll fight in the finals!"

Lee glanced at Naruto, and flashed him the 'Nice Guy' pose, his teeth pinging even more than usual.

Then the music changed.

Background Music: Ai O Tori Modose

" Entering from the west entrance... From the Land of Earth... 'The Brawler'... Fuji!!"

Greeted by cheers, the bounty hunter nonchalantly strolled onto the field, pausing every now and then to mug the camera. After climbing into the ring, Fuji pointed at Lee. Then, with a tight grin, the hunter jerked his thumb over his shoulder, the universal sign for 'You're outta here!'

" And now, our referee, Mr. Yowamushi!"

There was a series of confused mumblings, mixed in with some odd clanking as a suit of armor climbed into the ring.

"I'm ready!" Mr. Yowamushi's voice called out from within the metal suit.

As Mr. Yowamushi went over the rules from somewhere in the confines of his new protection, Lee went over his strategy, tossing his weights outside the ring.

A direct assault would not work on him, Lee thought, I'll have to try to catch him off guard if I want to make any decent strikes.

When the bell rang, Lee made the first move, charging at Fuji.

" Lee's going to rush Fuji!"

However, just as he got within arm's reach, the Taijutsu prodigy spun around on his heels, going around the muscular man.

" The rush was a feint!"

Lee crouched down and swung his leg out, kicking Fuji's right foot out from under him, striking directly where the leg and ankle connect.

" Fuji's going down!"

As Fuji went down, Lee continued his assault, zipping around to the other side of the bounty hunter. Once again spinning on his heel, Lee performed slammed his heel onto Fuji's chest.

" Taking advantage of Fuji's disrupted balance, Lee lands a powerful hit!"

"Go, Lee!" Naruto yelled as the rest of the audience cheered.

Lee's assault, however, didn't last long. Barely a second passed after the kick landed did Fuji grabbed the leg, and swung Lee over and onto the ring.

I knew it! Lee thought, trying to make little birdies fly away. He has a technique where he hardens his body enough to withstand physical blows! He activated it when I tripped him up, expecting a follow through...

Fuji, meanwhile, had gotten back on his feet and had now taken a fighting stance. Lunging at Lee, Fuji unleashed a roundhouse kick that would have taken off a gorilla's head. Lee ducked in time, saving his own head from decapitation. Following the kick, Fuji brought a karate chop down, which Lee just barely managed to avoid, and followed up with a kick to the jaw. Fuji stumbled back.

So that's it! Lee thought victoriously, He can't use his hardening technique when he's moving!

Lee charged, and unleashed a series of kicks and punches onto Fuji, his limbs becoming a blur.

"He's pushing Fuji back!" Shion cried, amazed.

"He's winning..." Naruto murmured, grinning wildly.

Jiraiya, however, wasn't so optimistic. "It won't last."

Just as Fuji began to fall back, Lee paused in his attack. That was enough for Fuji. Stopping his fall with his hands on the mat, Fuji shot his legs out, slamming his soles into Lee's chest, sending the Leaf Ninja flying into the ropes.

"Lee!" Sakura cried in alarm.

"What's going on!" Naruto yelled.

"I was afraid of this," Jiraiya muttered, "Lee's slim physique can't keep up with Fuji's body. Even if he lands a hundred hits, all Fuji needs to break Lee are a few clean strikes.

"What do you mean?" Shion asked.

"A shinobi's training does not include a defensive course," Jiraiya admitted, "We're mostly taught how to attack and avoid getting caught."

"And what happens when you *do* get caught?" Shion asked.

"That's what teammates are for."

Back in the ring, Fuji had gotten a hold of Lee and was now putting him in a series of painful wrestling locks. His earlier kick had knocked the wind out of Lee, tiring him enough to be caught.

" *Fuji now has Lee in an Argentine Backbreaker!*"

Lee did his best not to cry out in pain, though a groan just barely escaped his throat. Fuji increased the power of the hold, pulling down on Lee's head and legs even harder.

I...I have to get out this! The bowl-cut Ninja thought. Looking outside the ring, he saw Naruto's concerned face. *That's it!*

Lee quickly turned his body over, inverting his position in the hold. With his body under far less pressure than before, Lee quickly pulled himself out of Fuji's grip and landed a kick to the head. Leaping away, Lee went to his corner for a quick one-man powwow. So far, all of his previous attacks were making minimal progress, while Fuji was tearing him apart with minimal effort. It was a bit unfair, in his mind, that the fruits of his harsh training were useless against this man. Frustrated and maybe a little bit frantic, Lee journeyed down memory lane for any piece of Gai-Sensei's previously spoken wisdom that would inspire him to find a solution to this problem.

"Team, there will come a time when you fight an opponent you cannot beat immediately," Gai-Sensei said to his genin team after one mission, "But that does not mean it's impossible to win! Any foe can be defeated, any obstacle passed, any problem solved, and all you need to do is be patient and creative! And WORK HARD!!!"

"Thank you for your inspirational words, Gai-Sensei!" Lee sobbed, crying manly tears.

"You're welcome."

Lee's eyes bugged out, and he whirled around. "Gai-Sensei!!!"

"I came to watch your match, Lee!" Gai said in that loud manner of his, "You're doing great!"

"Where'd *he* come from?" Jiraiya asked, his face scrunching.

"Dude bought ringside seats." Ken replied, helping himself to more drinks.

"Where'd *you* come from!?"

Back in the ring, Lee, reinvigorated by Gai's appearance, had developed a new strategy for fighting Fuji. Moving at maximum speed, Lee zipped at and around Fuji landing glancing blows, never stopping. While each strike wasn't very painful, they would start to add up after a while.

" *Good lord! Lee's become a human blur! Fuji can't even keep up!*"

Fuji wasn't very happy with this arrangement. It wasn't that he didn't mind getting hurt, but he preferred to be hurt by something he could see . This called for what he considered drastic measures.

He's gotta slow down sooner or later, Fuji thought, going completely still. *I've just gotta wait.*

"Hey, what's Fuji doing?" Naruto asked, confused at how at ease the bounty hunter had become.

"I'm not sure..." Jiraiya muttered, "It almost looks like he's meditating..."

Meanwhile, Lee kept speeding around Fuji, eventually going in a circle. However, as he was running and hitting, something terrible(For Lee) happened. When he had kicked Fuji in the chest at the beginning of the match, he bruised his ankle on the hardened chest. And that ankle decided now would be a good time to make that pain known. Lee winced, and stumble juuuust a bit.

It was all the chance Fuji needed.

Sensing the fraction of hesitation, Fuji shot his fist out, punching Lee in the cheek. This wouldn't have been so bad, but the force of the punch had sent Lee into the ropes, which acted like a slingshot and bounced Lee back toward Fuji. The bounty hunter caught Lee and slammed him into the mat. Raising his leg, Fuji brought in down in a powerful stomp. However, before his heel could connect, Lee rolled

away just in time. Getting up, Lee glared at Fuji the best his almost broken body could allow. Oh, it hurt! Fuji must harden his body just before each blow connected!

I have no choice... Lee thought, and focused his thoughts into the far reaches of his body, beyond even subconscious thought. *Gate of Opening, release!*

Feeling a sudden rush of power, Lee charged at Fuji. Fuji swung a punch at Lee, but the Leaf Ninja swiftly dodged it, and used the momentum to grab and swing Fuji around and around and around.

"Lee's transforming Fuji and himself into a miniature tornado! My god, where did that burst of power come from!?"

Gai was worried. If Lee was releasing the Eight Inner Gates, that meant Lee was running out of ideas. And while it was true that he might become strong enough to win the fight, there was no way to know whether or not he'd be in any condition for the final match.

"Why's Lee spinning Fuji around like that?" Sakura asked Wan, "Why doesn't he complete the technique?" Sakura knew, having seen it before, that Lee was about to use the Front Lotus technique.

"He's trying to throw off Fuji equilibrium," The doctor explained, "He probably thinks that if Fuji is dizzy enough, he won't be able to use his hardening technique."

"Hardening technique?"

"It's how Fuji's been able to take all those heavy hits during the tournament."

"Lee throws Fuji up...!"

Lee leapt up after Fuji, using the Shadow of the Dancing Leaf to get behind the bounty hunter. However, before he could bind Fuji with the bandages around his wrists, Fuji swung his arms back, hitting

Lee with his elbows, *hard* . Taking advantage of Lee's pain, Fuji grabbed the bowl-cut ninja and brought him down to the mat in a pile driver.

"Law Breaking Front Lotus!"

There was an audible silence. Getting up, Fuji jerked a thumb to Lee, looking at Mr. Yowamushi's armor.

"Start the count." He said simply.

No response.

"Hey, are you paying attention?" Fuji asked, and tapped the visor on the helmet. The armor fell apart. "What the?!"

"Over here!" Mr. Yowamushi yelled from the Uzumaki family picnic. "Thought the ring was getting a bit too exciting."

Fuji's response was cut off by the sounds of movement.

" He's up! Even after taking all that damage, Rock Lee is back up!!"

While it was true that Lee was on his feet and in a fighting stance, there was a vacant look in his eyes.

He was unconscious.

Fuji's eyes narrowed. He didn't think Lee would be back up, even if he was out cold.

Might as well reward that tenacity... Fuji thought, and grabbed Lee.

"What's he doing?" Amaru asked.

Naruto's eyes narrowed and he gritted his teeth. "That b-tard..."

Fuji tossed Lee into the air, and leapt after him. Hooking his leg around Lee's neck, Fuji yelled "Iron Inquisition!" and squeezed. They

both hit the mat, Fuji on top of Lee. There was another audible silence.

Wan didn't even wait. He, Sakura and Lee were already gone.

"Er...The winner...?" Mr. Yowamushi muttered, raising Fuji's arm while the crowd cheered. He was kicked aside by Naruto moments later.

"You b-tard!" Naruto screamed, "You knew Lee was beat and you did that anyway! *WHY!?* "

"You should be thanking me for being so nice," Fuji smirked, "Instead of letting him fall over like a weakling, I gave him a warrior's proper send-off."

"Thanking you...?" Naruto hissed, his eyes starting to go red. Sensing the immediate danger, Jiraiya and Kushina placed comforting hands on his shoulders.

The otherwise tense situation was cooled somewhat by Ken, who popped up and said, "Well, there you have it, folks! The final match between Uzumaki Naruto and Fuji has been set! Which of these two intense warriors will win the Dragon Belt? Find out next time, at the Dragon Belt Championship!!"

D a t t e b a y o

A/N: Sorry it took so long to get this up! I was suffering from writers block. Well, not writers *block* , but more like the inability to type out what you mean.

Anyway, I threw in Amaru and Shion simply because I wondered what would happen if the girls Naruto met in the latest movies were to meet. I couldn't help but feel it would be like Ino and Sakura(Hence Naruto's question). I think Sakura's reaction is more about 'I used to act that way!?' than outright denial.

Anyway, review, and by that I mean, don't just say, 'I liked it' but also say WHY you liked it, and if you didn't, say why. Any criticism will only make me stronger, but any flames will be used to make popcorn.

The Time Limit is 30 Days

Opening theme: Yahho (Second opening theme for *History's Strongest Disciple Kenichi*)

Chapter 16: The Time Limit is 30 Days!

"Will he alright, doctor?" Guy asked worriedly.

"Well, bad as it was," Wan said, "I was able to piece his bone structure back together. If nothing else goes wrong, Lee should be ready for active duty...someday."

The entire group were at the hospital, visiting Lee. His match with Fuji had resulted with almost every bone in body broken, and was thus placed in the 'intensive care' ward.

"Thank you doctor," Lee managed to reply, "But is it necessary to chain me to the bed?"

The shackles clinked pitifully.

"Yes," Wan said flatly, "Sakura tells me you've got a habit of doing push-ups while in bandages. You can't do *anything* strenuous until I say so."

"But I am already in a body cast! Three body casts!"

"I take no chances."

Grimacing, Lee looked at Naruto.

"I am sorry I could not win, Naruto," He said, "I know you were expecting to fight me in the final round."

"Don't worry about it," Naruto replied, "You focus on healing. I'll beat that jerk for you!" He clenched his fists. "I'm gonna train my butt off

until the final match, and become strong enough to crush that guy!"

"Naruto... Is that even possible?" Sakura asked, "Do you really think you can do that between now and tomorrow?"

"The next match isn't tomorrow," Wan cut in simply, "It's in thirty days."

Naruto looked at Wan. "Really?"

"Oh, sure," Wan leaned back, stretching out his arms. "It's a tradition for the Dragon Belt's final match to take place 30 days after the semifinals, you remember, don't you, Kushina?"

"Yeah," Kushina developed a far-away look in her eyes. "I think it's so the Dragon Council can publicize the event as much as possible."

"Okay," Naruto smacked his fist into his palm, "Thirty days of hard training'll be enough. I've got this new technique I wanna perfect, too." Naruto leapt for an open window. "See ya in a month!" Naruto jumped out, and smashed into the building next to the hospital.

As he watched Naruto slid pitifully down the wall, Jiraiya said, "Well, I don't think I can wait a month. I'll tag along and see if I can help with so-called technique. Who knows, maybe he'll teach it to me."

"Oh, no you don't. I'm learning that new move first!" Kushina said, and leapt out the window, banging her head on the adjacent building. "Ow!"

Shaking his head and grinning, Jiraiya leapt out as well.

"Well, it looks like Naruto's going to be in good hands," Kakashi commented, "Me, I think I'll see what Fuji's up to."

"Fuji?" Sai looked at Kakashi in confusion.

"What would you want with him?" Yamato asked.

"I want to see what kind of technique Fuji's using to harden his body," Kakashi explained, "And maybe I can find out some information on whether or not he's connected to Akatsuki. Yamato, Sai, you two keep scouting the area for any Akatsuki members, and warn me if they come around."

"Yes, sir." The two ANBU ninja saluted.

"I doubt they'll try anything with Lord Jiraiya and Ms. Kushina nearby," Kakashi remarked, "But keep an eye out."

As the three ex-ANBU ninja left, Guy turned to Lee.

"Lee, I've got to get back to the Leaf Village," He said, "But don't worry! I'm certain that you'll be back on your feet in no time!" He gave Lee the Nice-Guy pose, his teeth shining. "I'm sure of it!"

"Stop that!" Wan yelled, giving Guy a psychic blow to the head. "That teeth thing always creeps me out!"

D a t t e b a y o

After hours of searching, Kakashi had found where Fuji was. For some reason, he wasn't surprised at the bounty hunter's choice of location.

It was a junk yard, and amidst the piles of abandoned machinery, wrecked ships, and broken appliances, Kakashi discovered a clearing, set right in the middle. There, Fuji was facing off against some kind of training dummy fashioned from scrap metal.

You're not just some thug, are you? Kakashi thought, from behind the battered hull of the SS. *BLUE* . He pulled up his headband. *Time to see what you can do...*

Thankfully, Blind the Buddha wasn't around...

D a t t e b a y o

Yamato jumped from roof to roof, while Sai walked the roads across town.

It's gonna be a long thirty days... Yamato thought.

D a t t e b a y o

Meanwhile, Kushina and Jiraiya had finally caught up with Naruto. The blond ninja was in large field, with numerous trees scattered about.

"This place is perfect for my training," Naruto commented, "Nobody around to get hurt."

"So, what have you got in mind?" Jiraiya asked.

Naruto didn't answer. Instead, he wandered over to a nearby tree. There, he used his kunai to carve an X into the middle of the trunk.

"This'll be the target." Naruto said.

"For what?" Kushina asked, cocking her head.

"My new technique," Naruto explained, "My first long-range ninjutsu... *Rasenhō!* "

D a t t e b a y o

A/n: Okay, another chapter done. Sorry that it's so short. I just wanted to set the setting for the next few chapters, which are, regrettably, gonna be fillers. (Sorry!)

Anyway, REVIEW plenty.

The New Technique

Opening theme: Yahho (Second opening theme for *History's Strongest Disciple Kenichi*)

Chapter 17: The New Technique

"Rasenhou?" Kushina asked.

"That's right," Naruto said, "It's gonna be like a beam version of the Rasengan."

"Interesting..." Jiraiya murmured, thinking about it. "Where did you come up with that?"

Naruto grinned. "Well, by accident, actually. When I was trying to add Wind-Style to the Rasengan, every time I tried it, it just ended up exploding in my face."

"That's because you needed two shadow-clones plus yourself to stabilize all of the chakra," Jiraiya remarked, "With only one, like with the normal Rasengan, you couldn't hold it all together."

"Right," Naruto nodded, "But while I was Kaiju Island, I tried doing it one-handed..."

"...And it blew up faster than usual?" Kushina guessed.

"No, mama!" Naruto yelled, "It transformed into a super-move that blew one of those giant monsters away!"

"Whoa, calm down," Jiraiya instructed, "And tell me, is that what this is all about? You wanna see if you can recreate whatever happened and mold it into a new Ninjutsu?"

"That's right," Naruto grinned, "But I don't just want an explosion that hits whoever's the closest. I want to transform that blast into a wave

that'll hit whoever's in my sight. It'll be a wind jutsu that'll end all wind jutsus! A beam of spiraling wind! I call it the *Futon: Rasenhou!* "

"Hmm..." Kushina murmured, before smiling. "I've got an idea."

Looking around, Kushina ran towards the closest tree in the area. There, she quickly carved a large X within a circle on the trunk.

"Why don't you use this as a target?" Kushina asked, "A beam's useless if you can't aim it properly."

"Right!" Naruto grinned and held out his hand. "Here it goes... Stand back!"

Tensing his muscles, Naruto began to focus his chakra. First, he formed the Rasengan...

Hmm, pretty good, Jiraiya thought, Originally, he need a clone to help out, but now he can make one all by himself...though I suppose the first way is more effective in battle. A clone can provide support and perform ninjutsu while the one holding the Rasengan can't.

"Okay!" Naruto yelled, "I'm gonna add the wind element now!"

Naruto's hand began to shake as wind chakra began to flow in...and then...

POW!

The resulting explosion not only blasted him off his feet, but also into Jiraiya, who was foolishly standing close behind. Kushina stared at the two idiots, and then at the tree.

"You missed."

D a t t e b a y o

Meanwhile, Kakashi continued to watch Fuji spar with the training dummy.

As far as I can tell, the one flaw in his style is that he takes a second longer to deliver a blow than another would, Kakashi thought, *However, he also seems so focused on what's in front of him while fighting that the rest of the world no longer registers.*

Down in the clearing, one of the training dummy's arms whapped into Fuji, but the bounty paid it no mind and simply knocked it away.

But his endurance levels are unreal...normal strikes won't phase him, much less cause damage! Kakashi thought, *Naruto, so far, the best you can do is keep using Rasengan until he falls...*

"Fuji."

Kakashi saw a tall man in a multicolored outfit covered in bells appear in the junkyard behind Fuji. However, up until the bell man had spoken Kakashi didn't even know that man was there!

That must another member of the Fuji's team, Kakashi thought.

"Kageo, I liked it better when you didn't wear those bells," Fuji grumbled, "Least back then, I had a good excuse for lettin' you sneak up on me."

"My apolgies, but old habbits die hard," Kageo said, continuing to smile. "I came here to tell you that it is ready."

"Good, I could use some decent exercise." Fuji sighed, and the two of them walked off. Kakashi quickly followed them, doing everything in his power to remain unnoticeable.

That guy looks familiar... Kakashi thought, keeping a close eye on Kageo. *But from where?*

"What are we going to do about Naruto?" Kageo asked, "Now that we know where he is, this is the perfect opportunity to complete that hunt, you know."

"Nah... No can do," Fuji replied, "'Sagainst the tourney laws to grab a bounty while he's still in the game. We'll get 'im after the final match. Hope he gives me a good fight, though..."

Kakashi restrained the urge to gulp.

So, that's it. They'll go after Naruto when the tournament is over, Kakashi thought, Rather than risk bumping into Kushina and Jiraiya, their plan is to wait until everyone's relaxed...

Eventually, the two men(And secretly Kakashi) arrived at a large sports field. In it, there were numerous people watching, as well as a television crew. But what drew Kakashi's attention was the group of prison inmates gathered together on the other side of the field.

What was going on, as was announced minutes later, was that these convicts would be given a pardon if they were able to defeat Fuji. Despite it being a weapons-free battle royal, Kakashi couldn't help but notice that the criminals had managed to hide some kind of blunt object, like a lead pipe on a baseball bat on their person.

Mr. Yowamushi, now standing within a glass box with air holes, held up his hand. "Annnd...begin!"

The criminals charged. Fuji flexed his muscles.

And the massacre began.

Despite being outnumbered, despite being the sole brawler without a weapon, Fuji made swift work of the convicts. While none of them were anywhere near ninja caliber, what they lacked in skill the made up in sheer toughness, and kept coming. However, Fuji had both skill *and* toughness, and kept knocking them aside.

For a moment, KAkashi couldn't understand what this exercise was supposed to improve. As far as he could tell, the only problem Fuji had was dealing with multiple attackers...at...once...

He's preparing to face Naruto's Multiple Shadow Clone technique! Kakashi realized, the light bulb turning on. Up until now, he's never fought so many people before. Fuji's trying to adjust his mind to fight in that respect. He knows Naruto can send wave after wave of clones at him...

D a t t e b a y o

POW!

That was the fifteenth backfire, and like the last fourteen, this one knocked Naruto off his feet. Wisely, Jiraiya had kept a good distance out of the blast radius.

Landing in Kushina's arms, Naruto groaned, "Dammit... Another backfire. What am I doing wrong?"

"Maybe you should use both hands, next time." Jiraiya pointed out.

"Huh?"

"Well, it's plainly obvious that you don't have enough mental power to focus and maintain the blast into a narrow wave with one hand," Jiraiya pointed out, "You didn't have that kind of control when you were first learning the Rasengan, and I have doubts you could muster that kind of discipline within a period of thirty days."

Naruto began to look despondent.

"But, you're creating something new, following no instruction other than your own," Jiraiya went on, "So, it's only natural that you'll encounter difficulties. When Minato was creating the Rasengan, he had his own fair share of difficulties. Why do you think it took him three years to create? And he needed to use two hands at first too. That's not much compared to the kid who reinvented the technique in a matter of days."

This cheered Naruto up a little. Then his stomach growled.

"Let's take a short break," Kushina said, clapping her hands together. "I told the reporters to bring some take-out here for us."

"Reporters?" Naruto blinked, "What reporters?"

"Those reporters," Kushina said, pointing towards a small band of people, "Some newspapers wanna interview you, so I told them they could as long as they brought lunch."

"You told that *each* of them?" Jiraiya asked, grinning. Whether it was Naruto or Kushina, anything connected with the name Uzumaki got interesting and fast. He couldn't help but notice that each news crew was carrying several dozen paper bags. Put together, the entire bunch had enough food to feed an army.

Naruto, however, looked kind of worried. "I've never been interviewed before!" He cried, sweating. "What do I say?"

"Just answer their questions," Kushina replied, "Just don't let them scare you. And don't be afraid to ham it up."

Naruto grinned. He *liked* to ham it up.

D a t t e b a y o

Back at the field, Fuji finished with his exercise. And by 'finished', meant that he had pummeled the mob of hopeful convicts into a state of unconsciousness.

"Let's try it again tomorrow, alright?" Fuji asked the prone bodies.

Behind a water cooler, Kakashi felt himself shudder.

Naruto, I hope you're having luck with this new technique, The Copy-Ninja thought, By the time the final match starts, you'll be fighting a whole new Fuji...

D a t t e b a y o

A/N: Again, sorry for the short and meaningless chapter. The next ones will have some credible plot, I promise!

Please Review! I need them to get properly motivated! And any flames will be used to give Sasuke a bad perm.

Rescue Mission! Save KakashiSensei!

Opening theme: Yahho (Second opening theme for *History's Strongest Disciple Kenichi*)

Chapter 18: Rescue Mission! Save Kakashi-Sensei!

Tsunade felt a vein beginning to pulse somewhere on her forehead. Such a thing was becoming more and more commonplace as the days went by.

Her current reason for said vein-pulsing was due to the newspaper she was reading, covering the events of the Dragon Belt Championship. More specifically, an interview with one of the finalists, Uzumaki Naruto. She looked at his response to a question on what he planned to do after the tournament. "To be become the next Hokage, duh!" would have been fine, but afterwards he spent the rest of the interview going on what he thought was wrong with the Leaf Village.

"At, at least he says some nice things about you, my lady." Shizune commented nervously.

Tsunade's eyes skimmed that part of the interview.

" Yeah, maybe Tsunade's a gambling drunk sometimes," Naruto said, "But she's pretty good when you get right down to it."

"Then he mentions that the alternative are a 'bunch of worthless old farts who couldn't find their butts with both hands'," Tsundae chuckled sardonically, "But I guess I could forgive him for that." She looked to the ceiling and sighed. "I wonder why those 'old farts' haven't come by to complain."

Shizune smiled sheepishly. "Who can say..."

The reason the elders weren't complaining was that they haven't seen the interview. Upon seeing it while fetching the newspaper for Tsunade, Shizune purchased as many copies she could, preparing them for the furnace, and did the same for every other newsstand. It was quite an expense, but she hoped that it would pay off. If the elders read that article, they would sentence Naruto to death, no questions about it.

D a t t e b a y o

In his private inner sanctum, Danzo glared at his newspaper with eyes of malice.

'Worthless old farts', indeed... He thought angrily, Enjoy it while you can, demon brat... When I become Hokage, I will have that mouth of yours sewn shut!!

D a t t e b a y o

In the scrap yard that had been commandeered by Fuji, Kakashi watched as Fuji ran on a treadmill. He had been running for several hours, and showed no signs of stopping.

Now he's trying to build up his stamina, Kakashi thought from his hiding place, He doesn't want to take the chance of getting exhausted while fighting Naruto. At least it's less painful to watch than when he was wiping out mobs of convicts...

An old man entered the scene, a peddler that Kakashi, out of the corner of his eye, had seen lurking around the large crowds, trying to sell...something. He wasn't sure what. This was very unsettling, as Kakashi had such an eye for detail, even without the Sharingan, that he could tell how many times Tsunade's veins throbbed (Something that was happening more and more, these days) could not, for the life of him, recall what exactly that old man was selling...puppets, maybe? Anyway, he and Fuji seemed to be talking about something. With the Sharingan, he was just barely able to read their lips. Something about finding a bounty?

Then he heard someone say, "Guess who?"

D a t t e b a y o

At the Hospital, Sakura steered a cart full of medical supplies down a hall. She was on her way back to Lee's room, having left when the bowl-cutted one began to argue with Wan over how certain natural functions could be completed while his body was sealed in a full body cast.

Down the way, she caught sight of a familiar face. "Kankuro!" She cried, "What are you doing here?"

"Here to pick up Muneko," Kankuro said, "She's being discharged today."

"Good." Sakura said. It wasn't that she didn't like Muneko, but she was always disposed towards women who knew full well what kind of effect their bodies had on men and loved to brag about it. Plus, it made her uncomfortably aware of her own figure.

"It's a pain in the butt, but since most ninja are considered acceptable targets in this country, Gaara thought that Muneko might need an escort." Kankuro explained.

"Acceptable targets?" Sakura asked, "What do you mean?"

"He means," Wan said, popping up. "That during the third war the lord of this country declared open season on all ninja."

("Where did he come from!?" Kankuro cried, jumping.)

"You mean it's legal to kill ninja in this country!?" Sakura cried, shocked. "That's awful!"

"Is it?" Wan asked, his eyebrow rising. "Look at the actions of ninja from the viewpoint of a girl who is in no way connected to the shinobi world, and tell if what they do is right!"

Before Sakura could come up with an acceptable comeback, something black and wet crashed through the window, before splattering against the wall.

"What was that!?" Kankuro cried in alarm.

"My theory," Wan said, "Self-writing graffiti."

The ink formed into words, saying:

Sakura

Kakashi is in trouble

Back-up needed

Sai

Then, the ink reformed itself into a bird-like shape and flew out the window.

"Gotta go!" Sakura yelled, leaping after it.

"Hey- wait!" Kankuro cried, following her.

Wan stared at the broken window, then at the message on the wall. Then, with a sigh, he pulled out a little snail from his coat.

D a t t e b a y o

Meanwhile, Naruto's Rasenhou-training was beginning to show results...

FWOOOM!!

"Aaargh!!" Naruto cried, being blasted off his feet. In front of his, the tree was almost blown off its roots.

...Minor as they were.

"That's progress," Jiraiya noted, "At least now you're able to hit the tree."

"It's not enough," Naruto groaned, "A breeze like that won't beat anyone in a fight!"

"I think," Kushina put in, "That before trying to win fights, you should do something about you getting blasted off your feet first. Otherwise, it won't matter if you complete the technique at all."

Naruto looked down at his feet, deep in thought.

D a t t e b a y o

Elsewhere, Sakura and Kankuro raced after the ink bird, following it into a forest east of the city. As they jumped through the trees, the pair saw splotches of ink and pieces of broken timber scattered amongst the woods.

"You don't have to help me, you know." Sakura told Kankuro.

"Says you," Kankuro said, "We're allies, remember? And we owe you for what happened with Gaara and Akatsuki."

"Thanks..." Sakura began to say when the sounds of violence caught her eyes. "Over there!"

Sakura and Kankuro followed the noise to a clearing, where they found a severely-roughed up Kakashi, Yamato, and Sai, facing off against three familiar characters; Blind the Buddha, Kageo, and Daku.

"More?" Daku asked, coughing.

"I told you..." Blind said, once again masked.

Kankuro raised an eyebrow at the strange appearance of the ex-ANBU's opponents.

"Who are those three?" He asked, pointing.

Sakura ignored him and rushed to the aid of her fellow Leaf Ninja. While all three showed signs of damage, Kakashi looked especially beat up.

As she healed his wounds, she glared at the bounty hunters.

"What do you freaks want?!" She demanded, "Why are you attacking my friends!?"

"Hatake 'Copy-Ninja' Kakashi has a bounty of 50,000 ryo posted for his capture," Blind said calmly, "We found him sneaking around Fuji's training area, and captured. Then these two," She gestured towards Yamato and Sai, "Appeared while we were transporting him to the nearest bounty station."

"Which worked out fine for us," Kageo cut in, "A ninja with a head worth 39 thousand ryo and one worth 25 thousand ryo are described to have ninjutsu that gives them control over wood and ink, respectively."

"Who posted those bounties?" Kankuro asked, pulling out a summoning scroll.

But Sakura had another question. "Who placed a bounty on Naruto?"

Kageo shrugged. "The Gato Corporation, under another name."

Sakura couldn't believe it. To think that mission in the Land of Waves so long ago could have such a profound impact on the present. She vaguely remembered Tazuna mentioning that Gato had worked with gangsters once, but who knew that they actually cared about that little tyrant? Then, Sakura's logic, a force almost as strong as her Inner Sakura, called something to attention.

"But Naruto wasn't the one who killed Gato!" She yelled, "It was Zabuza!"

Unfortunately, Zabuza had no intention of killing Gato until Naruto spoke up, Thought Kakashi, The Samurai that were with Gato must have implicated Naruto as an accomplice, and with Zabuza dead, that leaves only Naruto to take the blame. Whoever is in charge of Gato's gang must want to make an example of him.

"But, as there is no bounty for you two," Blind told Sakura and Kankuro, "We have no reason to fight."

"Wanna bet!?" Sakura screamed, and leapt at the bounty hunters. She swung a powerful punch, and missed as the three leapt away.

POW!!

As Daku landed, he had to jump aside, as Karasu swung at him. The old man looked to see Kankuro holding out another summoning scroll, his other hand outstretched in ninja-puppeteer style.

"I've got two more for you, old man!" The Sand Ninja warned.

However, Daku wasn't looking at him. His attention was on Karasu.

"How tragic..." The old timer murmured. Then, he gestured at some of the rubble created from Sakura's missed punch. As he swung his hand, a large rock threw itself at Kankuro, as if propelled by an invisible sling.

"Geh!" Kankuro grunted, dodging the projectile. His brain then alerted the Sand Ninja that just before the boulder flew, Daku had attached some almost microscopic chakra strings to it from his own hand.

He can use puppetry ninjutsu too...!? Kankuro thought, Who the hell is this old geezer...!?

Meanwhile, Sakura was trying to fight the mysterious Kageo. The key word being 'trying' as the bell'd **(1)** one had the disturbing ability to vanish from sight at a crucial moment, and then reappear

moments later, striking at the medic ninja. And it wasn't a super speed trick- She would have seen some sort of movement, like a bit of dust being unsettled.

He's... toying with me!! Sakura realized as another kick struck her face.

Sai and Yamato, off to the side, were unleashing a series of long range techniques on Blind the Buddha.

" *Chōjū Giga!*"

" *Mokuton: Daijūrin no Jutsu!*"

Tigers made of ink and great wooden stakes encircled the runaway Hyuuga, closing in on her. She crossed her arms, and then thrust them out lightning quick.

" *Gansaku Juken: Seirei Yari!*"

Both the wood and the ink beasts shattered instantly.

"Such tricks will not work..." Blind stated, "Sneak attacks happen to other people...not me."

She pulled out her walking cane. As the sunlight glinted off of the cane, Yamato realized the pole was *metal* ...

Resting against a tree, Kakashi could only watch as his allies were being outmatched...

This won't be easy...

D a t t e b a y o

A/N: Can our heroes defeat Team Death!?

Will Kakashi be saved!?

When is Naruto going to find out!?

Tune in next time, for Chapter 19: Those Without Faith!

Nothing else to say, but please review.

See Quest For Mama for details.

Chōjū Giga: Super Beasts Imitation Picture – The technique Sai uses to bring his paintings to life.

Mokuton: Daijūrin no Jutsu: Wood Release: Great Forest Technique – Yamato's technique that creates unspecific timber for use in battle.

Gansaku Juken: Seirei Yari: Fake Gentle Fist: Spirit Spear – A type of Gentle Fist that creates invisible arrows of chakra to emit from Blind's palms.

Those Without Faith

Opening Theme: Yahho (First opening theme for *History's Strongest Disciple Kenichi*)

Chapter 19: Those Without Faith

The battle between Team Death and the Ninja continued on without halt. However, this only made it worse for the ninja, who were beginning to feel overwhelmed by the unusual abilities of the bounty hunters. Sakura couldn't land a hit on Kageo, who kept disappearing without a trace, and was beginning to feel worn out. Kankuro was having trouble using his puppets on Daku, who seemed to be knowledgeable on puppet-ninjutsu as well. Not only that, the old man could create chakra-strings hard as steel.

But perhaps the ones having the worst problems were Yamato and Sai, who were fighting Blind the Buddha. Knowing she was secretly a Hyuuga, they tried to attack her from a distance with their signature techniques. However, Blind's Byakugan made it impossible for them to attack from behind, and what more, the so-called 'blind' Hyuuga had an aggressive streak, one that Yamato decided was because of her grudge against the Hyuuga Clan and the Leaf Village as a whole.

And watching it all was Kakashi, the alleged instigator for these events, accidental though it was. He lay against a tree, his wounds from fighting against (and losing to) Team Death earlier been healed by Sakura. He was currently watching Sakura's one-sided brawl with Kageo with his Sharingan, even though he knew it would slow and even undo his recuperation. However, he knew he had to solve the mystery of Kageo's disappearing act. Otherwise, Sakura would just keep trying to hit him until she collapsed from exhaustion.

However, Sakura decided to change tactics. After Kageo vanished from site yet again, she decided not to let a perfectly good punch go to waste, and sent it toward the ground.

POW!

As shards of stone and dirt flew, Sakura distinctly saw one pebble bounce off of something that she couldn't see.

There! She thought, and threw a punch in that direction. However, instead of hitting something that she couldn't see, something she couldn't see flipped her over, slamming her into the ground.

"A mighty river cannot be halted sometimes," Kageo's silky voice said to her, "But it can be *redirected* ."

Sakura grimaced. Great. Not only was her opponent toying with her, but now he was teaching her as well!

However, Kakashi had seen all that he needed to see. He stood up, and began to form hand signs.

A little bit away from where Sakura was fighting Kageo, Kankuro continued his battle against the aging Daku. He had all three of his puppets out, and was trying to blindside the old man with one while the other two distracted him. This was harder than you would think, as not only was Daku much more nimble than an old man should be, in accordance to the ancient rule that says if a ninja has lived to old age, he must be skilled, but he had a wildly different approach to using chakra strings. Rather than using the chakra strings to pull something closer to him, he used the strings to pull *himself* closer to whatever the strings were attached to. In this case, the whatever was the largest of Kankuro's puppets, Sanshouo. With a single gesture Daku threw himself up and above the salamander-like puppet.

Kankuro grinned, and pulled back, activating a function of the Sanshouo. One of the puppet's frills opened up, and several exploding tags attached to kunai fired out at the old man.

Ba-BOOM!

As the smoke cleared, a strange, spherical figure landed down on the ground.

It was a glowing blue ball.

As Kankuro stared, the ball vanished, leaving only Daku crouched down on the ground.

He wove a force field out of chakra strings to protect himself, Kankuro thought angrily, But there's only one ninja who could do something like that! Is he...?!

"You're Daikaiju, aren't you!" Kankuro accused, pointing as the old man touched down.

Daku gave Kankuro a very cool look. "I am. Why is that important?" He asked, wheezing.

Only because it means I'm fighting one of the Hidden Sands lost legends, that's why! Kankuro thought.

Daikaiju, along with Ebizo and Chiyo, had been Hidden Sand Village's first generation of Sand Siblings. Daikaiju stood out for his exceptional chakra control, capable of learning any technique. But then, one day, he just vanished without a trace. The last person to have seen him claimed that he had walked out into the deep desert.

I can only hope his old age gives me an advantage... Kankuro thought.

Ahead, both Sai and Yamato found themselves trying to keep one step away of Blind, who was now coming at them, swinging her cane like a sword. However, after one near miss, Yamato soon found that his left arm had gone limp.

"What the?!" Yamato grunted, trying to force life into the limb.

"What's wrong with your arm?" Sai asked, catching sight of this.

"I don't know!" Yamato cried, and glared at Blind. "She didn't even touch me...!"

"I don't have to," Blind replied calmly, "This special cane is designed so that when I flow my chakra through it, it shoots out needles of power capable of blocking your tenketsu...and you can't even feel them." The sunlight shined off of the cane for just a second, revealing dozens of tiny pin-point holes covering the surface. "And the best part is, thanks to the teachings of Third Hokage, almost all Leaf Ninja are useless without both arms," She shot forward. "Next I'll seal your legs."

As Blind moved forward, an ink tiger lunged at her. She effortlessly destroyed it with a flick of the cane.

"First him..." She said, and pointed at Sai. "...Then you."

Off to the side, Sakura was beginning to slow down. She had expended too much chakra... gotten too many hits...

Soon, she dropped to her knees.

"It seems you are no longer able to fight," Kageo's voice drifted in from nowhere and everywhere, "Now I can direct my attention to helping the others. You do not have a bounty. Therefore, there is no need to kill you. Death comes naturally to a ninja. If you have been trained properly, you should feel nothing for a fallen comrade..."

Sakura felt her blood boil. If she could only one clean hit...

"Sakura!" Kakashi yelled out, "To your left! *Grab him!* "

Without thinking, Sakura's arm shot out and gripped *something* . It felt like someone's leg.

"Ow! That hurts!" Kageo cried out somewhere above where she was gripping, "Let go!"

" *Chidori!* "

Kakashi flew past, his hand crackling with electricity. As he did, Kageo reappeared, looking rather shocked, in more ways than one. The reality of the situation poked Sakura in the brain, and she responded by slugging Kageo in the jaw. Letting go, Sakura let the bell'd one fall to the ground.

"I...can't believe it... This has never happened to me before... ever..." Kageo moaned from the ground.

Kakashi, wobbling a little, stood over Kageo.

"Sensei!" Sakura admonished, "I told you not to move!"

"Sorry..." Kakashi said, tilting a bit. "But it looked like you needed the help..."

Kakashi ultimately fell on his rear, but continued to look at Kageo.

"Looks like even my cloaking ninjutsu couldn't hide me from your Sharingan..." Kageo commented.

"That's right..." Kakashi replied, "But your first mistake was sticking around. Spies aren't meant for combat duty."

"Oh... You knew?"

"Kakashi-sensei, you know this man?" Sakura asked, surprised.

"This is a Hidden Rock spy I only heard about, who went missing during the 3rd Ninja War," Kakashi explained, "A 'shadow king' whose existence was only a rumor, and not a fact...until now."

"So, why did he leave?" Sakura asked, looking down at Kageo.

"It's simple..." Kageo replied, "The 3rd War was an independent act of the Villages not sanctioned by our daimyo... If a ninja can make their own decisions, couldn't we decide to leave? Besides... I don't really like that old... man..."

Kageo was out like a light.

"Is he...?" Sakura asked, cautiously.

"He's just in shock," Kakashi replied, "I suppose up until now this is the first time he's ever been hurt..." He glanced to where Kankuro, Yamato, and Sai were fending off attacks from Daku and Blind.

"Now, then... what do we do...?"

Blind and Daku separated from the ninja they were fighting and grouped together.

"Kageo lost..." Blind told the elder.

Daku shrugged. "So? That one was never any good in fights. A warrior should know more about taking punishment than giving it... That inexperience with pain caught up to him. At least now we can fight without worrying about him."

Kankuro shuddered. "Don't tell me those two were holding back up until now..."

"Captain Yamato, how is your arm?" Sai asked.

"Still immobile," Yamato reported regretfully, "And my legs feel bad as well..."

"We still might have a chance," Kankuro commented hopefully, "With that bell guy down, it's now five against two."

Daku chuckled at this. "Five against two? Right now, it feels like 4 against five!"

Daku threw his hand back, and chakra strings shot out, connecting to Sakura and Kakashi.

"What the-!?" Sakura exclaimed.

No! Kakashi thought, realizing what was next.

With another swing of his arms, Daku threw the two Leaf Ninja at their comrades. As they flew at the other three ninja, Blind swung her cane, paralyzing them.

"Not this again!" Sakura yelled, feeling her body go limp in the air.

As Yamato and Sai caught Sakura and Kakashi, Daku attached chakra strings to several trees.

Uh-oh! "Run!" Kankuro yelled.

The ninja jumped away, just barely avoiding the uprooted lumber Daku threw at them. In the explosion of splinters, Blind charged at Yamato and slammed her palm onto his chest. The ex-ANBU coughed up blood and landed onto the ground next to Kakashi.

That old man disrupted my movements...! Was Yamato's last thought before darkness claimed him.

"Now..." Blind turned her attention to Sai, Kankuro, and Sakura. The first two were being held down by the Daku's chakra strings, and the third was still paralyzed.

What's with this chakra!? Sai thought frantically.

Kankuro, however, had more pressing concerns. Such as the blind Hyuuga bearing down on them with murderous intent.

This is it!! The Sand Ninja thought.

Then, sound exploded.

"ENOUGH!!!"

Or maybe it was someone yelling really loud.

Wakimoto Osaka, dressed in yet another outlandish outfit, glared down on the stunned fighters from atop a fallen tree.

"Well!" He boomed, "Looks like the tip-off was correct! There *are* bounty hunters here!" He leapt between Blind and the three ninjas. "Have no fear! Not only do I loath bounty hunters, but I also have a soft spot for my fellow criminals! I'm here to help!"

"We're not criminals!" Sakura exclaimed the ground. (Sai had dropped her)

"You ninjas are the worst criminals in the world," Osaka chuckled darkly, "You steal, kill, destroy... and you're *paid to do it* ."

Sakura then remembered what Wan had said at the hospital.

" Look at the actions of ninja from the viewpoint of a girl who is in no way connected to the shinobi world, and tell me if what they do is right!"

"Now, stay back!" Osaka yelled, spreading his arms out. "You're about to learn why I was called 'Loud' Osaka!"

"Are you nuts, mister!?" Kankuro demanded, "These two were just toying with us before! What can you do alone!?"

Osaka chuckled. "Kid, let me tell you something. Only two types of people survived the 3rd War. The cowards who hid behind the dying heroes..."

It was at this point that Blind and Daku began to advance.

"You lock him down," Blind ordered, "It'll take me ten seconds."

"And we who *killed them!* " Osaka took a deep breath.

Air Quake Cannon!!

Osaka then screamed. Not just screamed, but he roared, yelled, and hollered, letting loose a blast of sound that made the very air shake, along with the ground. And it wasn't just loud, it was a heavy loud, the kind of loud that acts as a physical force. What this meant for

Blind and Daku, who were standing right in front of it, was that there was no way for either of them to approach Osaka. The power of his voice kept disrupting Daku's chakra strings. And wasn't too long before the pair of them were being forced back...

D a t t e b a y o

"What was *that*? "

Dr. Tai Wan and Rock Lee, still chained to his hospital bed, looked out the window, where a very powerful noise erupted from beyond city limits.

Wan rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "I haven't the slightest idea, Lee..."
Maybe I shouldn't have mentioned this to Loud...

D a t t e b a y o

Back in the forest, Blind and Daku, having found that a frontal assault on Osaka was never going to work, opted for one of the most basic strategies in the history of combat; Get 'im from behind 'fore he turns around. Unfortunately, Sai and Kankuro had decided that strange as Osaka was, it was better to be on his good side than against, and chose to watch his back. They were no match for the bounty hunters, but at the very least they could distract one long enough for Osaka to knock them away with a tree trunk, which, in his hands, made a very effective club. In one such intervals Kankuro demanded why Daku, while he was Daikaiju, had left Hidden Sand.

"I was tired..." Daku wheezed, throwing Kankuro against an before-then untouched tree. "So much fighting, so much killing...and for what? For a lord who doesn't even work for his own meal? I didn't want to be told what to do forever..."

Kankuro suppressed a grin. Half the Hidden Sand had nearly revolted because the Daimyo of the Land of Wind decided he didn't want to tell them what to do forever, and let them be.

"So, I left, hunting my own fate..." Daku coughed, ducking away from Karasu.

"And became a bounty hunter?" Kankuro asked, "How have things changed from when you were a ninja?"

Daku gave the young Sand Ninja a toothy grin. "By the fact I can choose my own missions, they have. Team Death doesn't *have* to be a team. We can split up anytime we want. You, on the other hand... *can't*."

"No one cares!!" Osaka roared, scoring a clean hit against Daku's back. The elderly Missing-Nin was sent flying into the horizon.

And then, all was quiet. Blind had mysteriously vanished, as had Kageo.

"Where did they go?" Sai asked, looking around.

"Fled, I bet," Osaka shrugged, his voice sounding a little raspy. Tossing the tree away, he said, "Can't stand bounty hunters. They're worse than vultures."

"Are you okay, Sakura?" Kankuro asked, helping the medic-ninja up.

"I think so..." Sakura said, rubbing her arms. "Whatever Blind did to me is starting to where off... Same thing happened after we met out near the Land of Waves."

As Sakura tended to the injured as best she could, the question came up again; Why did Team Death leave?

"For the same reason they left their villages," Kakashi reasoned, "No sense of loyalty."

Kakashi pointed out that the tracks from where Blind and Kageo had been went off in two different directions, and suggested they had gone their own ways.

"That might be it..." Kankuro remarked, "Daikaiju... I mean, Daku, made it sound like they didn't have any real sense camaraderie."

Kakashi tried to get up, but fell back down again.

"Kakashi-Sensei!" Sakura cried, "Stop doing that! You're injured, remember!?"

Yamato rubbed his stomach. "Well, I'm glad we were able to get through this without Naruto getting involved."

Kakashi nodded. As they were supposed to be protecting Naruto, it would be pretty embarrassing to be protected by him. Besides, he was getting tired of being saved by the little maniac...

D a t t e b a y o

" *Rasenhou!!* "

BWAO!!!

Kushina and Jiraiya stared in amazement at the damage Naruto caused. The tree he had been aiming at had a freshly carved hole where its trunk should be...

A big one.

"Wow..." Kushina murmured.

Jiraiya whistled. "I wouldn't want to be on the receiving end of that, that's for sure."

Naruto slumped down, panting heavily. "I did it... I finished the Rasenhou!" He grinned. "Now, I can win this thing!"

D a t t e b a y o

A/N: Done! Sorry about the long delay, had trouble focusing, so many things have been happening lately... Anyway, that's the end of

the Kakashi-mini arc. And I can personally guarantee that there is only one last filler chapter left before the main fight.

Anyway, the idea of Kageo and Daku being former Stone/Sand ninjas respectively were something I thought of waaaay back when I created them for Quest For Mama.

Be sure to leave lots of reviews! Please, please, pretty please!!

Night of the Rising Dragon

Opening theme: Yahho (2nd opening theme for *History's Strongest Disciple Kenichi*)

Chapter 20: Night of the Rising Dragon

"...So I've got the ninjutsu all worked out," Naruto finished, helping himself to another bowl of ramen. "Now, I just have to train normally like crazy until the match."

Naruto, along with Jiraiya, Kushina, and Team Kakashi III, were having a picnic near the koi pond in yard of the Osaka Inn. Unlike most koi ponds, it had catfish instead of koi fish.

"That's good to hear." Kakashi replied, trying, with some difficulty, to read Make-Out Tactics . Holding the book with bandaged hands was a very cumbersome task. Their recovery from the fight with Team Death had been well enough, though Dr. Wan had wanted restrain the ninja to the hospital for a little longer "Because you idiots don't sit still and rest like you should!" but had them released as there was nothing life-threatening about their condition.

A noise from the TV set in the lobby caught the ninjas attention. It was another ad for the final match of the Dragon Belt.

" Next time, on this year's DRAGON BELT!! Uzumaki Naruto versus Fuji! Which of these two warriors will take home the prize!? And who will be left in the dust!? Find out, next time, on Dragon Belt!!"

"They've been playing those ads nonstop." Sakura groaned.

Kakashi pulled a flyer out from where it was wedged in the book. Even literature wasn't safe from this mass advertising invasion.

"It's not often a Hidden Village ninja gets this far," Jiraiya commented. To Naruto, he said, "You win this thing, and you'll be the

first Leaf Ninja to get the belt since the First Hokage, Senju Hashirama, and he won BEFORE founding the village."

Naruto grinned, finished his bowl, then two more bowls, before standing up.

"Time to get back to work!" He yelled, and tossed the bowl overhead.

CRASH!

"Alright!" Tayuya screamed, miso soup dripping down her face. "Who threw that *%!)# bowl!?"

Everyone turned to Naruto-who had already beaten a hasty retreat.

D a t t e b a y o

And so Naruto trained- and trained, and trained, sparring with Jiraiya, Kushina, and himself with Shadow Clones. He even went as far as to transform his clones into duplicates of Fuji, in order to mentally prepare him for his match. Meanwhile, the Leaf Ninja continued their watch for any Akatsuki members or overeager bounty hunters. However, none could be found. Team Death- minus Fuji- had mysteriously vanished. And ads for the Final Match kept playing. In the final week before the battle, it became impossible for anyone to even blink without seeing a reminder for the fight to be. Merchandise, from T-shirts, tiny dolls, and silly, novelty wigs were being sold so fast that vendors could only see the products disappearing the instant they were put on display. The whole seemed to center on the Land of Dragons for those days...

D a t t e b a y o

Time: Day before Dragon Belt Final Match

"A festival?" Naruto asked.

He, along with his fellow Leaf Ninja and mother, were once again having a powwow in the Osaka Inn backyard. Lee was there too,

having just been discharged.

Jiraiya nodded. "That's right. It's called 'The Rising Dragon Festival'. It's a big extravaganza the World Dragon Council hold on the eve of the Final Match. You'll like it."

"Games, food, shows..." Kushina said wistfully, "They go all out. Minato won me a silly hat last time I was here. Hey, Kakashi," She looked at the Copy-Ninja. "Did you do anything for the Festival?"

"I couldn't," Kakashi said without emotion, "I didn't stick around that long. For me, it was, 'Get beat, go home.'"

"Well, I am going to stick around!" Lee exclaimed, jumping up. His eyes burning, he turned to Sakura and said, "Please, wait, Sakura! I will win you the most youthful silly hat of all!!"

"Uh, thanks..." Sakura replied, sweating. "But, maybe it doesn't have to be so youthful...?"

Sai, meanwhile, had another question, one for Kushina.

"This Minato..." He asked, "Is he Naruto's father?"

All action ceased as everyone looked at Sai, then at Kushina for her reaction.

"Yup!" Kushina smiled, while Naruto and Jiraiya made 'Cut! Cut!' motions from behind Sai.

"And who was he?" Sai asked, intrigued. This was the first he heard about Naruto's father, was curious as to what kind of person he was to get involved with Kushina.

Everyone held their breath...

"Oh, just some stupid ninja I knew back then." Kushina replied, waving him off.

Sakura sweated some more. "That's it?"

Sai thought about it. Naruto's father was named Minato...

And some people believed he resembled the Fourth Hokage...

Sai quickly abandoned that train of thought. The Fourth Hokage was reputed to be the best ninja the Village Hidden in the Leaves, and possessed, cool, logical sense. There was no way someone that smart would get involved with *Kushina*, a woman who seemed to believe that the world operated on faith and willpower, and had the subtlety of a flashflood. Whoever 'Minato' was, he must have been someone with much weaker genes. Otherwise, Naruto wouldn't have taken completely after his mother.

Naruto, deciding that the subject definitely needed changing, clapped his hands together and said, "All right! Tonight, I'm gonna party like no tomorrow!" He thought about the match. "Well, maybe not *that* much..."

"Naruto, deciding to hold back?" A friendly voice asked, "I must be dreaming...or having a nightmare."

Everyone turned to see Iruka and Anko enter the scene.

"Iruka-Sensei!" Naruto exclaimed.

"What are you doing here..." Kakashi asked, "With Anko, of all people?"

Anko snickered. "Remember that ticket I mentioned? It was part of a 2-for-1 deal! And I thought 'teach' here would like to see his little prodigy up close and personal!"

"You came to see me fight!?" Naruto asked, his eyes shining.

"Among other things..." Iruka admitted, then smiled. "Anyway, I just want you to know that the entire village is rooting for you."

"Yeah!!" Naruto crowed, pumping his arm.

"Except the elders," Anko put in, "But those old farts don't like anybody."

There was some laughter.

"This festival is gonna rock!" Naruto grinned, rubbing his hands together.

D a t t e b a y o

That night, the Leaf Ninja were busy strolling down the streets of the festival plaza, as shop keepers and game runners shouted and called for customers/suckers. While most of them were dressed in casual clothes, Kushina had decided to wear a yukata.

"These festivals are the only time you can get away with wearing something like this." She had sighed nostalgically.

As they walked, Yamato looked up and around in concern.

"Is it alright to be acting so carefree?" He asked aloud, "There's still a chance Akatsuki might attempt to capture Naruto."

"We haven't seen any sign of Akatsuki all month," Kakashi noted, "And with the entire world watching the Land of Dragons, I'll doubt they'll try anything tonight. Let's just relax, and keep a steady eye out for trouble."

Yamato nodded, and turned to Sai. To his surprise, he found himself staring at Ultraman.

"That stall was selling masks," Ultra-Sai explained, "Would you like one?"

Sai pointed to the stall. Already, Naruto, Lee, Kushina, Anko, and Jiraiya were clamoring over what they thought were the best masks.

"I think I'll pass," Kakashi replied, "I don't like to wear masks. That's why I left ANBU."

Sakura, Yamato, Iruka, and even Sai stared at the Copy Ninja.

" *You* don't like to wear masks?!" Sakura asked incredulously.

"That's right." Kakashi said cheerfully.

They continued to stare.

"Is something wrong?" Kakashi asked.

Before anyone could point out the apparent paradox, Naruto gave a yell.

"There's a *me* mask!" He cried, and held it up.

The mask had been painted to look like Naruto's face alright, except the three lines that were supposed to be his whiskers-marks were going up rather than down, and the eyes were painted shut, representing his squint.

"That's incredible," Sakura said, staring. "How do you think a mask ended up like that? Coincidence?"

"Not likely," Jiraiya replied, wearing a Pandaman mask. "Part of the Land of Dragon's income comes from the proceeds from the Dragon Belt. That mask probably part of the merchandise."

"So now they're making Naruto-masks as well..." Naruto murmured, "I guess putting it on would be redundant, huh?"

"Here," Kushina, wearing an Char Aznable mask, handed Naruto a Chaozu mask. "Try this instead."

Naruto absent-mindedly handed the Naruto mask to Anko and tried it on.

"How's it look?" He asked.

"It suits you, Naruto!" Lee, wearing a Ramenman mask said. "It is very youthful!"

Is that a good thing...? Anko wondered, putting the Naruto mask on.

D a t t e b a y o

As the group passed numerous stalls, Sakura bought herself some cotton candy.

"Hey, Sakura, can I have a bite?" Naruto asked.

"Just one." Sakura said, in a tone that suggested great violence if he toed the line.

Naruto, with the eye of an artist, viewed the cotton candy with great concern. After a moment, he took the entire mass of the stick and squished all together into a small ball.

"And now, for my first bite..." Naruto grinned, and popped the cotton candy ball into his mouth. As he chewed, a stony-faced Sakura pulled her fist back.

"Clench your teeth, smarty..." Was the only warning she gave.

D a t t e b a y o

"Some girls have no sense of humor," Naruto groaned, nursing his black eye. "I mean, I bought her a new one!"

Iruka chose not to comment, and grinned instead.

"Hey, a fortune-teller!" Anko cried, pointing. Without another word, she zipped right over.

Naruto turned to Iruka and asked, "Hey, are you and Anko..." He brought his thumb and pinky together suggestively. "...Like that?"

"Wh- no!" Iruka replied, blushing. "She and I are old friends! She was on my gennin team before Orochimari got a hold of her."

"Good," Naruto sighed, "Dating violent women is too dangerous."

Meanwhile, Anko held out her palm for the fortune-teller to read. The fortune-teller, an old and wizened man with a fake beard, stared at it.

"Well?" Anko asked.

The geezer said nothing.

"You get anything?"

Still nothing.

"If you say anything, old timer, I'll..."

"Very curious." Came the reply.

"You know what it says!?" Anko asked excitedly.

"No."

"No?!"

"Palms don't talk." The geezer said innocently.

Anko forced herself not to facefault. "I just want my palm read, you old fart!"

"Oh," The fortune-teller said in a relieved tone, "That's easy."

And then he poured paint onto her hand.

D a t t e b a y o

"You can wipe that smirk off your face, Mr. Class Clown," Anko growled at Iruka after finishing the fortune-teller, "Or else."

"Or else what?" Iruka couldn't help but ask.

Anko flashed him a venomous smile. "Or I'll make you my boyfriend."

Iruka went pale. "You wouldn't!"

Meanwhile, Lee had discovered one of those "Knock the bottles over" game stands.

"Excellent!" Lee slapped some money on the counter. "I will like to try, please!"

The man running the stand, a rather shifty-looking woman, handed Lee a ball.

"You only get one throw," She explained, "Your prize depends on how many bottles you knock over. Knock 'em all, you get a big prize," She pointed to some large stuffed animals. "Leave one standing, you get a decent prize," She pointed to some small toys. "Anything else gets you zilch."

"That sounds fair enough," Lee nodded, and gave Sakura a Nice Guy Pose. "Sakura! Do not worry, I will win you a fantastic prize! I promise!"

"Okay..." Sakura said, sweating once again at Lee's over-the-top attitude. Then she noticed the rather sinister-looking rooster perched near the stand.

"What is *that*?" She asked, pointing.

"That? That's my mascot." The game-runner replied.

Something inside of Naruto clicked. It was probably a light bulb.

"You've trained that rooster to crow in order to distract Lee, so you won't win!" he accused.

"Nah, you're hallucinating." The woman said smugly, "I assure you, he won't crow."

Lee, his eyes burning, began his wind up. Just as he began to throw, something unexpected happened...

"Ribbit." The rooster said calmly.

"It ribbits!?" Lee cried, missing the bottle stack, and the entire stand completely. The ball flew down an alley...

...Bounced off of a garbage can...

...Just barely missed Chan Ken's head...("Hey! Watch the face, dude!")

...Was knocked away by a man practicing for a watermelon cutting competition...

...landed in and was thrown out by a cotton-candy maker...

...Ultimately hitting the rabbit-ing rooster, causing him to fly into the bottles, knocking them down.

"Yes!" Lee cheered, pumping his fist.

The attendant stared bug-eyed. "...The hell?"

D a t t e b a y o

"...Thanks for the...doll," Sakura said, trying to figure out whether or not the plush toy was a duck or a beaver. "But I don't think it was worth it. What if that rooster causes serious damage?"

"Do not worry, Sakura!" Lee assured her, "I will treat it as a test of concentration, and ignore it until it goes away!"

The rooster paused from it's attack on Lee's head to make a noise that translates as, "Not bloody likely."

"Hey, look, turtles!" Naruto pointed out. He and Kushina rushed up to the 'Win-A-Turtle' stand and stared at the tiny terrapins.

"So, how does this work?" Naruto asked the attendant, an old, rodent-like man.

"If you can catch all of the turtles in the tank, you get to keep one of your choosing," The splintery man explained, "And you have to do it before your net brakes." His face scrunched up as a thought occurred. "And no ninjutsu. You use ninjutsu and I'll kill you."

"I don't need 'jutsu to win this!" Naruto declared, and speared his net into the water.

It broke instantly.

"Crud." Naruto groaned. Throwing the broken net away, he said, "Well, I don't really need a turtle, anyway."

"Yeah," Kushina remarked, "But they taste good."

The ratty man quickly packed up his stall and fled.

"Ah, that reminds me," Iruka said, checking his watch. "But, Anko and I have gotta go."

"Go? Where?" Yamato asked.

"Just to a private party," Anko said, and winked at Naruto. "Don't worry, you'll have your favorite teacher back in one piece."

Iruka sweated. "It's not that kind of party, I swear."

As a grinning Anko and embarrassed Iruka zipped off, Naruto realized that Kakashi and Jiraiya were staring at him.

"Iruka's your favorite teacher and not me?" Jiraiya asked, "What's he got that I don't got?"

"About...five years of parenting?" Naruto guessed.

"Okay, you got me there."

D a t t e b a y o

"Sai, what's that large snail you've got?" Yamato asked.

"I'm not entirely sure," Sai admitted, "But the man at that the stand told me it was a new form of wireless communication."

Kakashi stared at the snail, that not only had a speaker and a rotary dial pad, but also a big mouth.

"How the snail doubles as a radio?" Yamato asked, "How does that work?"

"The man said the snails are telepathic, so by attaching speakers and dial pads, they can be used as phones."

Yamato shook his head. "That is the stupidest thing I've ever heard in my life...how does an ANBU-trained ninja get taken so easily?"

It was at that moment the snail began to ring. The three ex-ANBU stared.

"Wh-what should I do?" Sai asked.

"Well, it's *your* snail," Kakashi said calmly, "Why don't you answer it?"

Cautiously, Sai picked up the speaker and put it to his mouth.
"Hello?"

" OWWW! Hot hot hot!! Why don't you watch it with that coffee!?" screamed the snail, its eyes wincing in imagined pain.

"Hello...?" Sai asked again, his mind racing. What was going on?

" Ooh, that burns...! Anyway, is that Lucci!? Ha, it is! I've got you now! Don't think I'm going to let you do what you want!"
The snail screamed again.

"Um, I think there's been a mistake," Sai said, his eyes darting. "My name isn't..." He looked at Kakashi. "Is it?"

Kakashi shrugged.

" I've got an army of sailors guarding me around the clock!" The snail ranted, **"So if you and the other CP9 think you can just waltz in here, forget it! You should just surrender, and we might go easy on you! Wahahahaha! What do you think of *that*?!"**

Sai looked at Yamato and Kakashi helplessly. They waved at him to go on.

Sai said into the speaker, "Mm, my name isn't Lucci. I...I think you dialed a wrong number."

" What!? Damn, did I make a mistake!? Damn it!"

The snail suddenly slumped over and fell asleep. Sai, his eyes a little wide, put the speaker back on the snail's shell and placed the snail in an alley, backing away from it.

"Who exactly sold that to you?" Kakashi asked.

"It, it was a man with a pigeon." Sai answered, staring at the snail.

D a t t e b a y o

Elsewhere, Iruka and Anko arrived at their destination, the Toyota Bar, Grill, and Karaoke.

"Do you see him?" Iruka asked, looking around.

Anko pointed and grinned. "There."

Iruka looked to where she was pointing. Over in a corner table, dressed in casual clothes, was Uchiha Itachi.

"Glad you two guys could make it." Itachi greeted, giving Anko a hug and Iruka a handshake.

"So, how'd you get away from Kisame?" Iruka asked, as he and Anko took their seats.

"I'm technically here on Akatsuki business," Itachi confided, "If Naruto gets killed in the tournament, they wouldn't be able to get the Nine-tailed Fox. I was sent to prevent that from happening. I was able to convince him to stay behind as people of his...ethnicity...tend to stand out."

"Yeah, a big shark-man *would* be hard to miss." Anko grinned.

Soon, orders were made and food was brought out. As the ex-teammates talked, conversation turned to current events.

"So..." Itachi put his chopsticks down. "Is it true? Is Sensei back?"

Iruka swallowed some ramen and nodded. "It's her, alright. She's not a woman anyone can imitate easily."

"I remember the time she smashed your dad into the street," Anko grinned, "It took the entire police force just to pull his head out of the pavement!"

The three shared a laugh.

Wiping a tear of mirth from his eye, Itachi asked, "Did she mention what she's going to do to me for what I did?"

Iruka grew uncomfortable. "I think she said something about unscrewing your head from your neck, and the only reason she bothered to take you on was to make sure you wouldn't become a psychotic murderer."

Itachi sighed. He had been expecting that.

"You should tell her what was going on," Anko suggested, "Maybe she'll go easy."

"No, she won't," Itachi sighed, "She'd only get angry for letting myself get caught up in such an awful mess."

"She would've done it the same way," Anko pointed out, "Isn't she the woman who tried to massacre the village council?"

"I tried that argument when she told me not to become a mass murderer," Itachi deadpanned, "And she told me mothers have special privileges and to do more push-ups."

"How many?" Iruka asked.

"I didn't keep track. She always told me to keep going until my arms lost feeling." Itachi replied.

(A/N: In that one sentence, we learn the secret behind Itachi's abnormal power)

Iruka shook his head. "Someday," He said, "I'm going to tell the entire world what the massacre was really about."

"Please don't," Itachi said pitifully, "This battle has been going on longer than me. I just want it to end quickly. I know what Sasuke would do if he found out from the wrong people."

"Speaking of which..." Iruka fixed Itachi with a cool gaze, "Naruto told me during that reunion three years ago, you told Sasuke he needed more hatred."

Itachi's stared. "...He heard that?"

Iruka nodded. Itachi sighed and leaned back.

"I really had no intention of meeting Sasuke that time. I just wanted to warn Naruto about Akatsuki and retreat from Jiraiya. But when he showed up, I...I panicked. With Kisame standing over me, I had no choice. I couldn't act less of the villain I was supposed to be. I could only hope that Sasuke would realize that the only reason a ninja needs hate was so that he could overcome it..." Itachi laughed bitterly, "We all know how that ended, didn't we?"

"It wasn't *all* your fault," Anko put in, "Orochimaru's curse mark did some damage too. From what I was able to pick up, that little snot kept pulling it out so much it's a miracle he could tell left from right."

"I might be able to solve that," Itachi said, "It's the least I can do. At least Naruto is fine. I can die knowing I didn't screwing him up."

"Die'...?" Iruka repeated, unsure.

As if on cue, began to cough and fell over. Anko and Iruka rushed to his aid.

"Left...pocket!" Itachi wheezed from blood.

Anko fished out a little bag of pills. Itachi swallowed five of them before calming down.

"Itachi, what was that?" Anko asked.

"Some kind of rare disease," Itachi gasped, getting back into his chair. "I'm told I've got a mild case of it."

"You should see Dr. Tai Wan," Iruka said, "He's in the country, we'll take you to him..."

"I already saw him," Itachi interrupted, "He's the one who gave me those pills. For all the good they'll do, according to him..."

"Listen up, Itachi!" Wan said firmly, "Your case is terminal. No medicine in the world can save you now. But these pills can at least dull the pain."

"This way, it won't hurt when I die." Itachi sighed somberly. Perking up, he said, "But, at least I had a few good years of my life...and some good friends."

Exchanging sad looks, Iruka and Anko got up and hugged Itachi.

"We'll miss you, runt." Anko said sadly.

Iruka separated himself and reached into his bag. He pulled out a camera.

"How about one last picture for road?" He asked.

"All right." Itachi agreed.

Three snapshots later (One for each of them, it was a Polaroid) they got back down to dinner.

"It must be rough, having to hide all the time." Iruka commented.

"I won't be hiding for long," Itachi replied, giving his friends a knowing smile. Iruka and Anko exchanged confused looks.

D a t t e b a y o

"Oh!" Sakura cried, pointing into the sky. "Fireworks!"

The gang looked up from what they were doing and saw several spectacular explosions in the sky. Each firework burst into a colorful shape, like a star or a flower.

BWAM! A mushroom.

"That's weird..." Yamato commented.

"No, it's not," Kushina replied, "Think about it."

BOOM! A star in a circle.

"That looks familiar..." Jiraiya remarked.

"I know /'ve seen something like it." Naruto said.

BANG! A hat.

"That makes even less sense than the mushroom." Sai remarked.

"I am sure it makes sense to *someone* ..." Lee said.

BOOM! An outline of Chan Ken's face.

"That ruined my night." Sakura groaned.

BAM! This one said 'Good luck tomorrow, boys! Love, Ken'

"Jerk." Naruto grumbled.

D a t t e b a y o

A/N: Another chapter, pointless as it is, done. Maybe not so pointless, though. I managed to get a reunion between old friends Iruka, Anko, and Itachi. You know, while I was planning this chapter, I found something interesting. While I had already came up with the idea of Iruka, Anko, and Itachi being part of the same genin team, I didn't think anyone else did. Then I went to deviantart and found this picture. Just type 'Iruka Anko Itachi' in the site search engine. In the results, just check the image titled Naruto – Team Kakashi, by mdchan. That meeting also brought to mind a strange parallel between their team and the original Team 7; while Iruka and Anko have more-or-less adjusted to Itachi leaving, Naruto and Sakura haven't with Sasuke, who's vengeful ways are driving more and more morals from his soul. Maybe that's the big difference, morals.

Allow me to explain some of the masks.

The Ultraman mask is a reference to the series *Ultraman*.

The Ramenman mask is from *Kinnikuman*.

The Chaozu mask is from *Dragonball*.

And the Char mask is from *Mobile Suit Gundam* .

Amazingly enough, the Chaozu and Ramenman masks appeared in canon. Right around when Naruto is learning Rasengan.

Anyway, be sure to leave lots of reviews when you read this, for next time it's the start of the Dragon Belt Finale! See ya there!

Grand Finale

Opening theme: Ai Believe(Opening theme for *Baki the Grappler*)

Chapter 21: Grand Finale

Morning in the Land of Dragons. The early birds were getting their worms, workers who had the night shift were going to bed...

HOOOONK!

...And Chan Ken was blowing an air horn.

"Good morning, fight fans!" Ken greeted to a camera, "It's here at last! The Grand finale of the Dragon Belt Championship! And boy, is it a doozy! In the red corner, it's the rebellious orange Ninja from the Land of Whirlpools...or Leaves...whatever...Uzumaki Naruto! And in the blue, that rock-hard heavy-hitter, Fuji, from the Land of Earth!"

D a t t e b a y o

In the Hyuuga Main House, the living room was packed. A small army of Naruto's friends- and other Leaf Ninja he knew- had camped out in front of Lord Hyuuga's big screen. Amidst the chatter and quarrels for a better seat, a woman's voice rang out.

"All right, SHADDUP!!" Tsunade screamed.

All was silent.

"As your Hokage, I should have you *severely* disciplined for skipping work to watch this," Tsunade said, waving her jug of sake. "But since I'm here too, I'm not one to talk. So, we're going to do this in a nice, orderly fashion. All tall guys- and girls, in the back with me! You runts get in front- don't sit directly in front of the set! Put at least three feet's distance!"

"Hey, where's your dad?" Tenten asked Hinata as they shuffled around.

"I don't know..." Hinata admitted.

D a t t e b a y o

In a pub usually frequented by very depressed ninja, Hiashi sat at the bar, staring at the TV set.

"Uh, Lord Hyuuga," The bartender said, polishing his glass. "Don't you have your own set?"

"I used to," Hiashi muttered, staring into his cup. "I used to."

D a t t e b a y o

"I know you're all eager to see our two champs," Ken continued, "So why don't we cut to our camera crews, who are checking in on the finalists? Let's start with that blond battery, Naruto, who's staying at the Osaka Inn!"

The camera cuts to an old fashioned Japanese hallway.

"Naruto!" Kushina's voice calls out, "Aren't you ready yet!? We have to get to the stadium!"

"I can't find my forehead protector!" Naruto yells from somewhere.

The camera goes around a corner. As it does so, the yelling gets louder.

"Just wear the headband I gave you! You can't wear any sort of armor anyway, remember!?"

It goes around another corner. Off to the side we can see a room door open, showing some random things being thrown aside from the small opening.

"Are you still looking for that thing?" Jiraiya's voice asks.

"I can't find it!" Naruto yells in answer.

"Oh, for the love of... It's right there, on the mantle!"

The camera moves in to the room.

"Oh, okay!" Some banging. "Alright, I'm read-!"

On this note, the camera is just outside the door when Naruto charges through. The last thing before static fills the screen is Naruto's surprised face.

Ken grimaced. "Uh...okay... Let's go scope out the Fuj-ster!" He decided, brightening.

Camera cuts to an old hut in an alley. As it moves in, we hear ringing.

"Grahh!"

An alarm clock flies out a closed window(Crash!) and into the camera. Static.

Ken frowned. "You know, someday we gotta get finalists who won't break our stuff."

D a t t e b a y o

"C'mon, Anko!" Iruka called back, as the stadium came into view.

"Yeah, yeah," Anko grinned, "Just don't forget on whose tickets you need to get in, smart guy!"

As the pair approached the stadium entrance, Iruka noticed several people gathered outside of the ticket stand. They seemed familiar for some reason...

As Iruka and Anko charged through the entrance, the following conversation took place between the people and the ticket seller.

"Are you sure there aren't any available seats left?" The elegant woman with movie-star looks asked.

(Kazahana Koyuki- *Naruto* movie 1)

"For the last time, we are sold out, ma'am." The exasperated seller replied tiredly.

Koyuki frowned. Then, she smirked, and flipped her hair back.

"You know, I *am* a famous movie star as well as royalty," She said, fluttering her eyelashes. "Can't I count on a fan of Princess Gale to sneak me in?"

The ticket seller grinned. "Sorry, but if it helps, they wouldn't let me sneak into the premier of your last movie either. Beat it."

Grumbling, Koyuki stomped off. Next up was an overweight man and a glasses-wearing boy.

"I believe we have some tickets reserved," The man said, "For the royal family of the Land of the Moon?"

(Tsuki Michiru & Hikaru – *Naruto* movie 2)

The seller looked it up in his computer. "Nope."

Michiru blanched. "No!?! But I know I arranged for *something* over a month ago!"

The seller nodded. "Yeah, you reserved tickets for the *semifinals* . We were wondering why you never showed up that time."

Michiru slumped. Hikaru facepalmed in dismay.

"Ah, dad..."

D a t t e b a y o

Meanwhile, deep in the stadium, the medical staff was undergoing a very intensive sound-off.

"Alright, team!" Dr. Tai Wan barked as marched back and forth, "This is what we've been waiting for! No matter what happens, I won't excuse anyone who doesn't pull their weight today! Is that understood!?"

"Sir, yes sir!" The younger staff members saluted- except for Sakura, who stared in wonder and fascinated horror.

What is going on here?! Sakura thought frantically.

"Corporal Tofu!" Wan glared at a man in glasses. "How many bandages do we have!?"

"Enough to wrap a mummy!" Tofu saluted.

"Get more!" Wan declared before glaring at an chubby woman. "Lt. Milan! Has the equipment been properly sterilized!?"

"Sir!" Milan saluted, "It's clean enough to eat off of! Sir!"

"Then stop eating and clean it again!" Wan yelled, before focusing on Sakura. "Bottom-rank Volunteer Haruno!"

Sakura jumped, and found herself saluting. "Yes, sir?!" She shrieked in surprise.

"I should warn you, since you'll be on the field with me," Wan said in a low, mean voice. "That any slacking on your part will result in an immediate court martial! Is that understood?"

"Y-yeah..." Sakura stammered, "But, aren't you all acting a bit...?"

" Is that understood!? "

"Sir! Yes, sir!"

D a t t e b a y o

In the audience area of the stadium, Anko and Iruka had gotten to their designated seats. Apparently, these seats were in the section that was neither too far away from the ring without being real close, which is very annoying when you thought that you were getting ringside view.

"Stupid scalper," Anko muttered, crossing her arms. "'You'll be close enough...' Yeah, right!"

Iruka smiled awkwardly and sweated when he heard some...rather offensive muttering from his left.

"#\$%...Popcorn costs... Soda costs... It's robbery, those &\$^..."

Iruka turned to see the red-headed girl he saw at the Inn push and shove her way into the empty seat next to him. He felt a rustle of movement and realized that Anko was staring at her.

Tayuya felt Anko's gaze and glared back. " *What?* " She hissed.

"Aren't you one of Orochimaru's bodyguards?" Anko asked suspiciously.

"Yeah," Tayuya growled, "And aren't *you* one of his throwaway experiments?"

As the two members of the unofficial 'Orochimaru used me as a pawn club' glared at each other, Iruka became painfully aware that he was stuck in the center of a potential catfight. As his practical side began to calculate how many bones would be broken from collateral damage, his whimsical side began to wish he was A) a turtle, so he could hide in his shell, or B) a bird so he could fly away.

Then, a miracle happened.

Anko grinned. Tayuya's lips twitched. They clapped their hands together.

"Nice to meetcha!" Anko laughed.

"Same here." The flutist replied.

Iruka collapsed in his seat.

"What's with him?" Tayuya asked, looking down at the teacher.

"He just doesn't get out enough." Anko replied.

D a t t e b a y o

On the field, Sakura was helping set up the medical tent when she felt a rustle of movement. Looking around, she saw a much skinnier Pandaman lurking by a water cooler.

"Pandaman? What are you doing here?" The pink-haired ninja asked.

"I'm here to cheer my good friend Naruto on!" Pandaman said, his eyes darting around. "But don't tell anyone I'm here!"

Sakura slowly looked around, trying to see if she could spot what was making the panda-themed wrestler so jumpy.

"I'm hiding from Tomato Gang, a gangster I borrowed money from," Pandaman explained, "I hoped I could use the prize money from the Dragon Belt to pay him off, but... Oh, crap! It's Unforgivable Mask!"

Pandaman vanished from sight, as a skinny man in a speedo and wearing some kind of cartoonish dog mask ran by. Before Sakura could contemplate this any further, music began to start up. She turned her attention towards the ring, where Ken was standing.

"Hello, people!" Ken declared into a microphone, "And welcome to the 17th Dragon Belt Championship *Grand Finale!!* "

The crowd screamed.

"So, it's started, huh?" Wan asked.

Sakura jumped. "Where have you been?!"

"Bathroom break," Wan explained, "I'm not missing it for the world!"

"I'm sure you fight-hungry battle fans have waited long enough," Ken continued, "So, we're gonna make you *wait some more!* "

The audience screamed again. This time, however, Sakura had a feeling they weren't cheering. One person in the first row had pulled out a knife.

"Okay, okay, I was just fooling!" Ken laughed, "But, seriously, I want every one of you sadists to take a moment and think about the pain and suffering our finalists have gone through to get this far." He ducked a thrown bottle. "Okay, I think we've thought long enough-bring on the *gladiators!!* "

Background Music: Tough Boy (TOM*CAT)

"Entering from the East Wing," Ken introduced, "From the Land of Earth... 'The Brawler'... Fuji!!"

Fuji marched onto the field, looking very confident and belligerent. As he stomped towards the ring, he shook his fists at the screaming crowd. After he climbed into the ring, he flexed an arm, rubbed a bicep, and then smack his fist into his palm.

"Aw-RIGHT!!" He roared.

"Right in my *ear* , dude!" Ken groaned, wiggling a finger in said appendage.

All over the stadium, Kakashi, Yamato, and Sai stared from their respective watch posts.

"He's certainly energetic." Kakashi commented over the radio.

"What about his allies?" Sai asked.

"So far, no sign of them," Yamato reported, "I don't think they're coming back."

Background Music: Hero's Comeback (Nobodyknows+)

"And now, entering from the West Wing," Ken declared, "From the Land of Whirlpools... 'The Hero'... *Uzumaki Naruto!!* "

Naruto stepped onto the field, flanked by Kushina and Jiraiya. He was wearing a red long coat with black flames painted on the back, and a giant scroll slung over his shoulders by a strap. The crowd went wild, but Naruto paid them no mind as he walked toward the ring.

... Naruto charged out, a Rasengan in hand.

" Take this!" Naruto yelled, slamming the sphere into Fuji's chest. Fuji went flying, spinning into the mast of his ship, causing it to break in two from the force...

... Fuji tossed Lee into the air, and leapt after him. Hooking his leg around Lee's neck, Fuji yelled "Iron Inquisition!" and squeezed. They both hit the mat, Fuji on top of Lee. There was another audible silence...

Naruto's eyes narrowed on Fuji.

As Naruto arrived at the ring, he set the large scroll onto the ground, vertically. Then, he used the scroll as a support to lift himself into the air and flipped into the ring.

"Nice threads." Ken commented.

Naruto paid Ken no mind. He kept glaring at Fuji. In a long, drawn out gesture, he pointed at Fuji, then at the stone ring. Fuji smirked.

Though no words were spoken, almost everyone could feel the dialogue being exchanged.

You're going down...Naruto would've said.

Just try it... would have been Fuji's retort.

Off to the side, Lee clenched his fist.

"Good luck, Naruto..."

D a t t e b a y o

A/n: At last, the final round! Okay, the actual fighting will begin in the next chapter, I promise! Don't throw that stuff at me- hey, put that rope down! I swear, next time we'll have *combat* .

I'm sure most of you recognize Naruto's new intro song, from the first episodes of *Naruto: Shippuden* , but how many of you knew that Fuji's new opener was the second opening of *Fist of the North Star* ? Anyone?

Anyway, please leave lots of good reviews.

Naruto vs Fuji

Opening theme: Ai Believe (Opening theme for *Baki the Grappler*)

Chapter 22: Naruto vs Fuji

"Now, before we can begin the match," Ken said, "Let me introduce our guest referee!"

"Guest referee?" Naruto asked, "What happened to that old guy Yowamushi?"

"Oh, he refused to participate on the grounds that he wanted to enjoy the match without getting hurt," Ken explained, grinning. "So! With great pleasure, I give you, *Uchiha Itachi!!* "

Almost everyone from/associated with the Hidden Leaf Village turned to look. The same thought ran through their heads;

WHAT did he say!?

There was a flutter of crows, and Itachi appeared in the center of the ring, looking aloof as always. However, had anyone been paying close attention, they would have noticed that he seemed to be looking *too* aloof, the way someone guilty of murder would be whistle in a sad attempt to look nonchalant.

("Him, huh?" Fuji chuckled.)

Luckily, everyone was too shocked to even care how aloof Itachi was.

"Itachi!? Are you nuts!?" Naruto exclaimed.

"Is there a problem?" Ken asked.

Before anyone ringside could answer that, Kakashi, Yamato, and Sai leapt down from their posts. Kakashi grabbed Ken by the lapel of his shirt, his face (Of what little could be seen) a picture of fury.

"You *idiot!* " Kakashi hissed, "You invited a member of the most infamous band of murderers here!"

"This," Ken said with a hint of irony, "From an assassin."

"How did you sneak into the country?" Lee asked, taking a fighting stance. "I thought the borders were being watched."

"I didn't sneak in," Itachi answered emotionlessly, "I entered through the main entryway."

Sakura, who had approached the ring with Wan, asked, "And no one stopped you!?"

" Right, everything should be in order," A clerk at the Land of Dragon's Custom's Office stamped a passport before handing it back. "Welcome to the Land of Dragons."

" Thank you." Itachi said, taking the passport.

The LoDCO clerk frowned. "'Ere, now... Do I know you? You look familiar..."

" I have one of those faces." Itachi replied.

"It may not matter how you entered," Yamato replied, forming hand signs. "But we know how you're leaving!"

Itachi gave Yamato a cool gaze. "Now's not the time for that. Trust me."

"Why should we?" Kakashi asked, pulling up his headband. His sole Sharingan glowed ominously.

"Because, it's time for the final match!!" Ken exclaimed, intervening. "Attacking the ref' is a definite no-no!" Music began to start up.

" *Hold it!!* " Kushina screamed out. The music screeched to a halt.

Everyone looked at Kushina, who was glaring at Itachi, her face a picture of fury.

"You've got some nerve, showing yourself to me after what you did," Kushina hissed, pointing. " *Tachi-kun!* "

Oh, that's right, Naruto realized, Itachi was mama's student!

Up in their seats, Anko elbowed Iruka. "You think she's going to kill him?"

"The only reason I even bothered with a weakling like you," Kushina ranted, "Is so you wouldn't go on a killing spree! How do you think it makes a teacher feel, knowing her student sunk so low!? What have you got say for yourself!?"

Itachi, who seemed to be subconsciously sinking his head into his Akatsuki cloak in a manner reminiscent of a tortoise, murmured, "I... have nothing to say, sensei."

Kushina's cheeks flushed, and steam seemed to emit out of every pore on her body.

" *YOU'RE EXPELLED, DAMMIT!!* " She screamed, and in mid-lunge, froze. "Let go of me, Doctor!!"

Wan, trembling and sweating, gritted his teeth. "If...you...kill him..." He said shakily, "He...can't...declare...your son...the winner...!"

Kushina contemplated this for a moment. When the moment ended, she relaxed. Afterwards, Wan collapsed, panting.

"Fine." She muttered, and stomped over away from the ring, seating herself firmly on the ground.

God, she's strong! Wan thought, staring up at the sky. He glanced at Itachi and thought, *But there's no point in killing Itachi, today...his fate is sealed. It's funny...but that disease always seems to hit those with bloodline abilities...*

After everyone had mellowed out (In the comparative sense), Itachi performed a body check on both finalists. While he had found no tools on either of them, there was some difficulty when he pulled out Naruto's Leaf headband.

"It's a good luck charm." Naruto insisted stubbornly.

"All metal objects are forbidden." Itachi replied, and tossed the headband to Jiraiya. The perverted sage took the headband without a word, but continued to glare at Itachi.

It should be noted that the ring they were in was made of stone, with no ropes. This meant that there was nothing protecting the finalists from impacts or ring-outs. Luckily, the twenty second rule for ring outs was still in effect.

Then, with all else said and done, there was little to do but let the tension rise as both finalists glared at each other from opposite corners of the ring. Somewhere, someone began to play ceremonial drums. Naruto threw off his coat.

Ken threw his arms up. "Let the Dragon Belt Championship Grand Finale begin!!"

BONNNG!!!

"Naruto and Fuji begin with a symmetrical charge at each other! This is Zakomaru Ari, the commentator you just love so much!"

"Hagi Girochin !" Fuji dove into a tumble, and as he completed his roll, stuck out his left leg.

Naruto jumped aside and formed handsigns. " *Kage Bushin no Jutsu!* "

Two clones appeared where Fuji was, *under* where he was, and sudden sensation of being on top of something that just appeared forced him into the air, off balance. In that moment, Naruto blasted forward and landed a right hook onto Fuji's chin.

" *A thrilling clone-hook combo from Naruto sends Fuji reeling!*"

Sakura felt her jaw drop as she watched Fuji stumble back.

"How...?" She asked, amazed. This was probably the first time she ever saw the hulking brute be forced back by anything.

"Why so surprised?" Wan asked, sitting up. "You should know that getting hit on the chin hurts no matter how big you are. You do it all the time, don't you?"

Sakura realized he was right, on both counts. But she had been doing it for so long that she had forgotten why she struck someone's chin, and just did so out of reflex.

Back in the ring, Naruto had formed a Rasengan and was about to hammer it into Fuji.

" *The Rasengan already!?*"

Fuji, just before the spinning sphere made contact, grabbed Naruto's wrist and threw him over. The Rasengan crashed into the ring, sending up chunks of rubble.

"So close!" Lee groaned.

"He's good, that one," Jiraiya admitted, "He's probably trained his body to keep moving even his mind becomes disoriented."

Lee noticed that Jiraiya giving the bounty hunter a rather fixed glare.

"Is something wrong?" He asked.

"I can't say where, but I know I've seen that fighting style somewhere before..." The Toad Sage answered, frowning. "And I think Itachi has, too..."

Lee glanced at Itachi, who was also glaring at Fuji with his Sharingan.

What kind of history do those two have? He wondered.

Meanwhile, Naruto recovered from the throw just in time to avoid a devastating punch from Fuji, who followed up with several kicks.

"Fuji's leg have become a blur, jabbing at Naruto a hundred times! But, the blond ninja maintains his defense, avoiding the blows. However, it appears that now Naruto cannot strike back!"

I have to get out of this... Naruto thought frantically, *Even a glancing blow might be the end!*

Then, an idea struck Naruto. He quickly formed handsigns.

"Kage Bushin no Jutsu!"

The clone appeared directly *under* Naruto, propelling him into the air.

"Naruto takes to the sky with a clone springboard!"

Nice, Naruto! Sakura thought.

Lee was worried, though. *He's escaped for now, but that method has made him an easy target! All Fuji has to do is wait for Naruto to fall back down.*

Fuji certainly seemed to have that in mind, as he took a stance to deliver a punch.

"Fuji is preparing to strike! Can Naruto pull another miracle escape!?"

"Kage Bushin no Jutsu!"

A clone appeared and pulled Naruto away as Fuji swung his fist. Then, with the added momentum, the Naruto's spun around in the air and kicked Fuji in the face.

"Eat feet, ape!" Naruto yelled as his soles made contact. However, this didn't hurt as it did annoy. Fuji shoved both palms of his hands into Naruto.

"Testu Shushou!"

"Fuji's attack sends Naruto out of bounds!"

CRASH!

"Not on the popcorn maker, dude!" Ken groaned.

Itachi stared at the ruined cart where Naruto had landed. Then, almost emotionlessly, began to count. "1...2...3...4..."

"Owowowow!" Naruto yelled, jumping up. "That's hot!"

"Naruto!" Lee yelled.

Naruto looked up from his current endeavor to fan his toasty buttocks.

"You have to get back in the ring!" Lee told him, "Or you will be disqualified!"

Naruto realized that Itachi was already to '11' in his count, and rushed back to the ring, getting back in at '18'. His chest sent a message to his brain that it was suffering from slight pains.

That hurt! He thought, I can't near Fuji without risking a another one like that, and if I do, I can't do any serious damage without a Rasengan... Only one thing to do.

Naruto cupped his hands together. "Time for... *The Rasenhou!!* "

D a t t e b a y o

A/N: The fight has begun! I'll bet none of you saw Itachi's appearance... How did Itachi get a job as referee? Well, it went something like this...!

Ken: Hey!

Itachi: Hmm?

Ken: You're that missing-ninja, Uchiha Itachi, aren't you?

Itachi: ...What if I am?

Ken: The final match of the Dragon Belt is coming up, and we need celebrity ref! You want in?

Itachi: ...Alright.

Cue facefaults!

And here are the translations to Fuji's moves.

Hagi Girochin – Leg Guillotine

Testu Shushou – Iron Palm

Review lots! See you next time!

Ultimate Technique! Naruto's Blitz!

Opening theme: Ai Believe (Opening for *Baki the Grappler*)

Chapter 23: Ultimate Technique! Naruto's Blitz!

" *This is... Naruto is about to unleash a new move! What is this 'Rasenhou'!?*"

Fuji cocked his head.

Naruto grinned, and began to concentrate. In his hands, a small ball of chakra began to form.

"What's Naruto doing...?" Jiraiya muttered, "He can't use it like that!"

Lee looked to Jiraiya for help. "Lord Jiraiya, what is wrong?"

Jiraiya said, " *Rasenhou* is a long-range attack, using the wind-element to transform the Rasengan into a cannon. However, the cannon is more powerful than Naruto's body can handle!"

Lee jumped and looked wildly at Naruto, who was still building up power.

"You mean... He is going to hurt himself!?" Lee asked, horrified.

"No, the Rasenhou won't do that kind damage," Jiraiya replied, "However, the force of the erupting wind is more than enough to knock him off his feet...and here he'll be sent out of the ring again!"

Lee gulped. "Well... it *is* Naruto... Maybe he has a plan..."

"I hope so..."

Meanwhile, the chakra ball in Naruto's hands was beginning to shake as the wind-element was being added.

"Here it comes, you creep!" Naruto yelled, and thrust his hands forward. " *Rasenhou!!* "

There was a sound like a thousand knives being sharpened, and a beam of light, wrapped in tiny points like the saw teeth, burst forth. Unfortunately, the force of said beam ended pushing Naruto directly backward, sending him once again out of the ring.

"Argh!!" Fuji exclaimed and made evasive maneuvers. The saw-beam drilled past him and crashed into the wall of the stadium.

"That was scary..." Fuji gasped, "That coulda killed me... Erg!"

Fuji looked down and saw that the left-most part of his jacket had been sliced into tatters, and there were numerous cuts in his side.

"Didn't even feel that..." Fuji muttered, "I didn't think that fox had the nerve to try something like that..."

Fuji looked up and glared at where Naruto had been thrown. As mentioned before, the recoil of the Rasenhou had forced Naruto out of the ring, sending him crashing into the stadium wall behind him. However when the dust settled, he wasn't there!

" *Naruto has disappeared! Where could he have gone to!?*"

"Up here, ape!"

Before Fuji could react, Naruto plummeted down from the sky and landed a knee-drop onto where Fuji's neck connected to his back. With a groan, Fuji fell to his knees.

" *Incredible! Naruto somehow flew into the sky in order to come down and deliver a decisive blow onto Fuji! And to think he did it in the few seconds after unleashing his Rasenhou!*"

That's not it, Thought Itachi, When Naruto propelled himself into the air the first time, he created another clone to draw Fuji's attention.

That's what used that insane ninjutsu before... The real Naruto was still above us the entire time.

D a t t e b a y o

In the squatter-infested Hyuuga living room, a cheer went up.

"Way to go, Naruto!" Tsunade yelled, partially drunk. "See how *he* likes a strong hit!"

D a t t e b a y o

Fuji pushed himself back onto his feet, and swung a powerful kick at Naruto, who ducked away.

"Fuji has gotten up, and is now trying to land a roundhouse kick onto Naruto! But Naruto keeps evading the blows!"

As Naruto kept jumping back from Fuji, Fuji kept spinning around on his heel, following him.

Whoa... He's getting faster! Naruto realized, watching Fuji's form become a blur.

"F-Fuji's becoming some kind of muscular tornado! What strength! What speed! What control!"

After Naruto jumped back for the umpteenth time, Fuji slammed his leg down.

"Roundhouse Tsunami!!"

The impact of the kick created a powerful shockwave, sending up bits and pieces of the ring and blasting Naruto out of the ring again.

"Naruto's out of the ring again! This must be his third consecutive ring-out!"

"What happened!?" Sakura cried.

"If I were to guess, I'd say those earlier sweeps were to prepare for this," Wan commented, "Fuji must have purposely allowed Naruto to dodge his kicks before in order to build up the necessary speed... once he had that, the impact of the kick against the air would have caught Naruto, even if the physical blow itself missed. It's a pretty popular trick."

"You know an awful lot about fighting for a doctor..." Sakura noted.

Wan shrugged. "The World Dragon Council hires me to take care of their fighters. Once they've had some anesthetic, some need a muzzle to keep from bragging about their techniques."

"Naruto's back on his feet! He's going back into the ring! You'd think he'd never felt that last blow!"

Whether or not Naruto felt the force of Fuji's kick was irrelevant at this point- what Naruto felt was that it was time to stop messing around and just *do it*. He leapt into the ring and got in his face. Fuji chopped his hand at Naruto's neck, but the blond ninja swiveled out of the way and around the bounty hunter, getting directly behind him. Naruto clapped his arms around Fuji's waist and began to form handsigns.

"Kage Bushin no Jutsu!"

There was a puff of smoke, and Naruto and Fuji appeared over twenty feet in the air. Holding them up was a leaning tower of Narutos, each one sitting on the other's shoulders.

"They're so high up! That stack of clones can't hold them forever- They are! They're falling...!"

Which is exactly what Naruto wanted. "Narutimate Suplex!!"

The tower fell backward, curving over as it went. There was a thunderous *crash* as Fuji's head made contact with the ring.

"He got him!" Iruka cheered.

"Pretty good for the mouthy squirt," Tayuya admitted, "On his own, that turd's light frame couldn't pull off a suplex on Fuji's heavyweight frame without injuring himself."

"Well, they do say 'Many hands make a lighter load!' Anko whooped.

In the ring, Fuji's body twitched and his arms began to push himself out of the stone.

"Don't relax, Naruto!" Jiraiya warned, "Fuji used his hardening technique to withstand that!"

"I know!" Naruto yelled, and charged.

Just as Fuji righted himself, Naruto leapt up at him. As if polishing an invisible ball, Naruto quickly moved his hands together and slammed his palms into Fuji's forehead. This, unfortunately, allowed him to be slapped away by Fuji. However, the bounty hunter stumbled a bit, as if caught off guard by something.

Naruto didn't land outside of the ring this time, and quickly charged at Fuji, creating a clone in the process. The two Narutos began to run around Fuji, who took a fighting stance. The two/three fighters began to brawl, exchanging, blocking, and dodging blows.

" Now Fuji and Naruto... The Narutos...are caught up in a flurry of fists! I can barely see their movements!"

Itachi could see the fight blow-for-blow, thanks to his Sharingan. And he could see that while Naruto was putting up a good fight, if he didn't do something, the grapple would end badly for the blond...

And that's when things *did* end badly. Fuji got a clean hit, slamming his palm right into Naruto's face. Luckily, this one was a clone. Unfortunately, the blow was so strong that the *memory* of being hit made Naruto wince, leaving him open to a kick.

POW!

Naruto sailed out of the ring, slamming into the stadium wall.

"Wha...what a powerful kick! Even if Naruto survived, someone might have to peel him off the wall!"

Wan sighed and wrote something down.

"What's that?" Sakura asked.

"Just keeping track of the injuries we'll need to take care of after the match," Wan told her, "You should know that a little preparation goes a long way."

"That- That sounds like you don't think Naruto can win!" Sakura exclaimed.

Wan shrugged. "I never said Naruto can't win. However, Naruto's already taken some serious damage during the match. No matter what happens, he'll need to be put in a bed *immediately*."

Sakura bit her lip and looked toward the ring. Naruto had already gotten off the wall and was back in the ring.

I've got to hit him with a Rasengan, He thought, Or this match may never end! Maybe this'll work...

"Kage Bushin no Jutsu!"

About five clones appeared. Then, in one swift movement, the clones began to run around Fuji.

"What is Naruto doing?" Jiraiya muttered, "That kind of gimmick won't work... Especially if Naruto just stays out in plain sight!"

Heedless of the clones, Naruto and Fuji glared at each other. Then, Naruto grinned and made a handsign.

Instantly, the clones dissipated. And because they were already in motion, the smoke caused by their vanishing consumed Fuji.

"I don't believe this!" Iruka exclaimed, "He used the *deactivation* of the technique as an offensive move! My class clown's become a genius!"

"Gah!" the bounty hunter cried, coughing and wheezing. Then he heard something spinning in the air.

"Rasengan!!"

Naruto leapt through the smoke and slammed the ball of spinning chakra into Fuji's chest.

"Naruto moves through his own smoke and lands a direct hit on Fuji!"

"He got him!" Sakura cheered.

However, Kushina, Itachi, and Wan continued to frown.

Fuji gritted his teeth and tensed his muscles.

"Tekkai Utsugi!"

Fuji's chest seemed to *inflate* for brief half-second, and that reaction disrupted the Rasengan, causing it to self-destruct, blasting Naruto backwards!

Lee's eyes ignited. "What!?"

"No way!" Sakura yelled.

Naruto looked at his trembling hand and then at Fuji. Then he got a good look at him. "You're...!?"

D a t t e b a y o

A/N: Bum bum BUM!! Sorry it took so long to update. I'm not very good at fight scenes. Anyway, please update, and next time I'll reveal the big secret.

Tekkai Utsugi – Iron Mass Empty Tree

This is actually a fighting move created by Oda for One Piece , so he gets the credit for this one.

Please Review!

He Who Overcomes

Opening theme: Ai Believe (Opening theme for *Baki the Grappler*)

Chapter 24: He Who Overcomes

A stunned silence reigned throughout the stadium. Even Ari was shocked speechless. Fuji had taken a Rasengan without flinching, but that wasn't the biggest surprise...

"What... What is he?" Lee gasped.

"It's finally out..." Wan murmured.

"What?" Sakura glanced at Wan suspiciously.

"That explains why his fighting style is so familiar." Jiraiya commented.

"I wondered what happened to him..." Kushina remarked.

"Are you kidding me?" Ken asked.

Naruto kept staring at Fuji. Then he looked down at where his hair had fallen. It was a wig. The mustache that had once rested on Fuji's upper lip had been knocked off as well. Naruto looked back at Fuji, even though he didn't look like Fuji anymore. But he wasn't a complete stranger. Naruto had seen that face before.

" This... This is unheard of! Finalist Fuji the Iron Hammer is actually Testumura Jinmaru! Winner of the previous Championship!!"

That must be why Itachi was glaring at him, Kakashi thought, He lost to Jinmaru during that tournament, and knew from his chakra who he was from the very start!

"The secret's out, huh?" Jinmaru shrugged. He tapped the spot where the Rasengan connected and winced. "Oooh!"

Naruto didn't say a thing. So many thoughts were running through his head. Well, one was. And he wasn't sure if it was a question or a statement.

"You were wearing a wig!?" He exclaimed, pointing at the displaced hairpiece. "What the hell is going on!?"

Jinmaru smirked. It was an ugly expression on him. "You wanna know? Well..." He pointed at Itachi. "It's all his fault."

As one, everyone else in the stadium went "Huh?"

Itachi blinked, confused, then his eyes narrowed. "Oh, I remember." He muttered.

"That's right, Mr. Big-Shot-Slayer-of-the-Uchihas," Jinmaru growled, his tone getting darker. "I thought it would be a great finale, but you couldn't keep up with your inflated reputation! What a joke!"

"What's he talking about?" Sakura asked.

Wan sighed. "He's referring to the less-than-stellar performance of the last tournament's finalists. Back then, Fuji, or should I say, Jinmaru, entered on behalf of his spiritual order, hoping to bring them honor by winning the Belt. Unfortunately, the rest of the world was currently at the peak of the 'peaceful era' set when the 4th Hokage sealed the Ninetaild Fox away. That meant the competition wasn't at its best. And none of them could stand against Jinmaru's overwhelming strength! His relentless enthusiasm, when set against his less battle-ready opponents, brought about one of the most one-sided and brutal tournaments in history!"

Sakura gaped. "Even against *Itachi*... ?"

Jinmaru spat. " *Puh* . That weasel? It was an insult for that Genjutsu-lover to enter! Weakling tricksters should stay out of *men* 's battles!"

Itachi groaned slightly. Back then, he hadn't had full control of his Mangekyo Sharingan, and entered the tournament to bring it out. Maybe he had gotten a bit cocky, having such an easy time in the quarterfinals and semifinals, but he was unprepared for the simmering pot of pent-up frustration that awaited him in the final round...

Three years ago, Itachi formed a handseal. "Genjut...!"

" Teryaa!" Jinmaru screamed, charging forward and slugging him. As Itachi flew back, Jinmaruo grabbed his foot...

Itachi felt a slight twinge of pain in his ankle. It was fortunate that no one from the Leaf Village had been there to see that match. He wasn't sure if he could have survived afterwards, what with his extensive injuries.

And he wasn't the only one unhappy with the last tournament's outcome. Jinmaru seemed to have slipped into a rant.

"They called me a monster, and I was expelled from the order for *over-extensive brutality* ," He roared, "And why? Because I was playing the game the way it was meant to be played! It wasn't my fault! Everyone else was too weak!!"

Jinmaru, having just been banned from the temple, wandered into a dark alley, before falling on his face.

" You're too strong..." A voice said.

" Huh?" Jinmaru looked up and around. All he could see in the direction the voice had spoken from was a single, glowing red eye...

" In this peacefully era, people with your strength are shunned and buried..." The eye continued, "Weaklings rule the world, now..."

The eye vanished, leaving Jinmaru alone...

"That's why I became a bounty hunter!" Jinmaru yelled, "To remove weaklings from the world!"

"That is so stupid!" Sakura yelled.

"You wanna tell *him* that?" Wan asked sarcastically.

"And it worked!" Jinmaru continued, "This Dragon Belt is much better, now! I can win with *dignity!*"

Naruto felt a tremor of rage in his gut. This adrenaline-thirsty monster attacked his friends, and he was talking about *dignity!*?

"So why the wig?" Sakura demanded, "Why do this in fake identity?"

"I can tell you that," Kushina said, walking towards the ring. She pointed a finger of truth at Jinmaru. "Without that costume, you'd have never been allowed to enter!"

This new development staved off Naruto's outrage for just a moment. What was mama talking about?

"One of the oldest rules in the Dragon Belt is that champions are not allowed to reenter," Kushina explained, "That's why I didn't enter myself."

"What kind of rule is that?" Lee asked.

"It goes back to when the championship was originally an initiation test for the Dragon Monks," Ken put in, "You can't be initiated twice, right? You're only allowed to win once."

"So..." Sakura's mind ignited as a brainstorm's lightning struck, "So, Fuji- I mean, Jinmaru- he shouldn't even be here! He already won! He has to be disqualified! Naruto wins by default!" Naruto wouldn't have to fight this brute!

Everyone in the audience began to murmur at this. Ken rubbed his chin in thought. Up in the cheap seats, Iruka closed his eyes and groaned.

"What's wrong?" Tayuya asked.

"It won't work," Iruka said softly, "Even if it is legal..."

"Huh?"

" *No!* " Naruto's voice rang out. "Don't disqualify him!"

Huh!? Everyone in the audience thought.

"Naruto, do have any idea what you're saying!?" Sakura exclaimed.

"Yeah, I do!" Naruto yelled, "I don't care if Itachi didn't fight hard enough six years ago! I don't care what his so-called order did to him! I don't care about any rules! If you throw him out before I beat him, I'll never forgive any of you! I still have to make him pay for what he did to Lee and Kakashi-sensei! And besides," Naruto directed his sharp, clear eyes onto Jinmaru. "I don't want anyone to think I need a technicality to win!!"

" *I'll* be the judge of that," Ken said, stepping forward. After a moment's consideration, he pointed at the wig Jinmaru wore as Fuji.

Naruto got it. He grabbed the Fuji wig from where it lay and tossed it to Jinmaru.

"Put that ugly piece on so I can beat you up!" Naruto yelled.

Jinmaru stared at the wig, then grinned nastily. Within seconds, Fuji had his hair, mustache, and sunglasses again.

Ken shrugged. "Works for me, dude."

Everyone in the audience, and Sakura, facefaulted. The sound of their collective crashes was interpreted as a signal to resume the

fight by Naruto and Fuji, and the two launched at each other, trading blows.

" There they go! Naruto and Fu...Jin... Whoever he is are in each other's faces once more! How much longer than they keep it up!? Between Naruto's excessive use of ultimate techniques, and, uh, Fuji's taking one of them head-on, they must have both used up considerable amounts of power! Where are they getting that stamina!?"

Crap... I'm starting to run down...! Naruto thought, as he frantically parried and blocked blows. With all those shadow clones, the Rasenhou and Rasengan, his chakra was beginning to tap out.

Crap...I think I pushed it a little too hard by taking that Rasengan...! Fuji thought as his stomach gave a twinge of pain. While his defensive technique used early had indeed heightened his resistance enough to absorb the full power of the spinning chakra sphere, the rotation effect managed to cause a subtle amount of damage to seep in.

Outside the ring, Sakura recovered from the facefault.

"I can't believe that idiot..." She grumbled, "He had a chance to get an easy win, but turned it down! He hasn't changed a bit... He's always making things harder than they have to be!"

"I think he feels a win he didn't earn would be harder to accept," Wan told her, "Naruto strikes me as a man who would prefer to die with his morals than live by abandoning them. Without those morals, that sense of honor...he would be no better than Kakashi."

Sakura thought about this. "What...what kind of man was Kakashi like?" She had never heard her former teacher's name spoken with such cold disgust. What did Kakashi do?

Wan had a far off look in his eye. "He...was the perfect ninja. And that's the worst kind there is. I've seen what this world ruled by

perfect ninja is, for what it truly is, and I am not impressed. Rather, I am disgusted. What the world needs is an imperfect ninja, a ninja with obvious inabilities, an honest ninja...I lost hope that such a heartfelt being could be."

In the ring, Naruto coughed up blood as Fuji landed a kick in his gut. Stumbling back, he wiped his mouth and went back at it.

D a t t e b a y o

"N-Naruto!" Hinata cried in alarm.

"C'mon, Naruto," Tsunade yelled, waving her *sake* cup. "Beat that guy!"

"You can do it!" Konohamaru cheered.

D a t t e b a y o

Mt. Oinari

"Hey, Kawazaki!"

Kawazaki, froggy seal master, looked up from his crossword.

A tanuki pointed at the screen of a somewhat low-tech television. "Isn't that the fox kid you mentioned? You know, Minato's boy?"

Kawazaki peered at the screen. "Why, so it is! Good show, Naruto!"

D a t t e b a y o

Location Unknown

"Are you all right, Lord Orochimaru?" Kabuto asked, as he handed his master another pill.

Orochimaru, currently bed-ridden with some body-related illness, ignored his right-hand man to glare at the TV across from him. As he

watched Naruto fight against someone whom even Itachi couldn't beat, he felt a certain regret that he didn't kill that little fox boy three years ago. As sweat ran down his temple, he consoled himself with the knowledge that while he was immortal, Naruto *wasn't* .

"Where is Sasuke?" The Snake Master hissed questioningly.

"In his room, sleeping."

"Does he have any cable access?"

"No, sir."

"Make sure it stays that way."

D a t t e b a y o

Row 6, Section B, Seats 24-25

"You can do it, Naruto!" Shion and Amaru yelled, just before glaring at each other.

D a t t e b a y o

A Bar

"Hey, he's going to win, right?" asked Michiru, looking up at the bar's TV anxiously.

"Of course he is!" Snapped Koyuki.

Hikaru clenched his fist, keeping silent. *You can do it, Naruto...!*

D a t t e b a y o

I have to do something... Naruto thought, jumping away from Fuji. *Everyone's watching! I can't blow this!* And, like with all idiots savant, an idea struck. *That's it!*

Gathering chakra to his feet, Naruto blasted upwards.

" *Naruto leaps high into the air!*"

"Here comes the Rasenhou, jerk!" Naruto screamed, and began to form a chakra ball.

"What's he doing?!" Jiraiya exclaimed, "He can't maneuver in the air like that!"

At least he'll learn not to shout out his moves before attacking...
Kakashi thought glumly. This was going to go south and how.

Meanwhile, Fuji leapt into the air and put his leg around Naruto's neck...just as he did with Lee.

" *Iron Inquisition!* "

"Naruto!" Lee cried in alarm.

"That's it, he's done." Anko sighed.

"Hahahaha! Good try, kid!" Fuji gloated, beginning to squeeze. "If I got hit by that beam again, you would win! Too bad I can't wait for you to charge it up! But at least you up a decent fight! I feel *good* about winning now!"

"If you liked that, you'll love this..." Naruto grunted, and with effort, swung his entire body weight around so that Fuji was underneath him. " *Futon: Rasenhou!* "

The force of the erupting tornado blasted Naruto and Fuji down so fast and hard that the two of them not only crashed *into* the ring, but *under* the ring- Six feet under.

All was silent.

Then, Itachi began to count. "1...2...3..."

" Um...Naruto and Fuji appear to have buried themselves underneath the ring...and, ah... Boy, they must be sore. I don't think anyone can get up after that."

"...10." Itachi finished. Neither of the two finalists had gotten up. He gave Ken a 'Now what?' expression.

Ken shrugged. "First one on his feet wins. We just wait."

And they waited. A minute had passed, and still no movement from Naruto or Fuji.

"C'mon, Naruto!" Iruka yelled, "Get up! You're so close!"

That started it. Pretty soon, the entire stadium was filled with cries of "Naruto!" "Fuji!" and sometimes, "Whoever the muscle guy is!"

The cheers halted as a hand popped out. It gripped the ring's surface. Then, slowly, a figure pulled himself out of the crater.

Heaving, Naruto threw his head back and screamed.
"AAAAARRRRRRGGGGHHH!!!"

" T-total Knock Out! The winner of the 17 th Dragon Belt Championship is...Land of Whirlpool's Uzumaki Naruto!"

Naruto stopped screaming when he realized someone was holding up his hand. He looked at Itachi...who turned into a flock of crows and flew off. It was a clone.

But Naruto had no time to dwell on this as he was suddenly assaulted by his friends and family as they crowded around, offering their congratulations.

Off to the side, Wan looked down the crater. Jinmaru's entire costume, not just the wig and glasses, had been torn off, save his unmentionables. The brute was unmoving. Smiling, Wan clapped his hands and the disgraced monk floated up out of the hole and onto a stretcher. As Jinmaru was carted away, Naruto couldn't help but

notice his hand seemed to be stuck as fist...with the thumb sticking out.

Then, the crowd parted, and Naruto saw Ken marching towards him with some kind of white sash in his hands. He held it out to Naruto.

On the front of sash was the kanji for 'dragon'.

Naruto took it. He then realized that the headband Kushina gave him had fallen off. Grinning, he took the sash from Ken and tied it around his forehead.

As cameras flashed and fans cheered, Naruto held up his fists.

"Yeah!"

17 th Dragon Belt Championship

Winner: Uzumaki Naruto

1st Runner Up: Fuji (*Tetsumura Jinmaru*)

2 nd Runner Up: Rock Lee

D a t t e b a y o

A/N: And that's it, it's over! I really don't know what to say...but, woo! That's a load off my mind! This is probably the last Naruto fanfic I'll write...maybe. I'm not sure. But for now, I'm out of ideas. And I'm taking a break. Thank you for being so supportive. If you would like to read any other non-Naruto stories I have, just click on my profile.

PEACE OUT, Y'ALL!!